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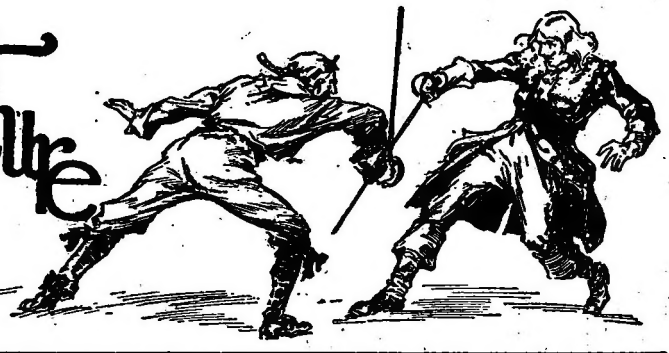

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By TALBOT MUNDY

A story of adventure in Africa by the author of "Hira Singh's Tale" and "The Soul of a Regiment."

THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN FACES

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By H. A. LAMB

A tale of thrilling experiences in the South Sea Islands.

THREE OPALS

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By OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

The queer events surrounding a bank robbery in a sleepy South Carolina town.

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GHOST ISLAND

A Complete Novel

By Courtney Ryley Cooper

FROM far away came the roar of ponderous tractors as they clattered along through the dawn, their trains of wagons bobbing and jerking and rumbling behind them, their glaring spot-lamps gradually dimming with the growing light, their shivering drivers huddled over the steering wheels, half turning now and then at the shouts of the brake-tenders on the bumping, jolting vehicles in the rear.

Down at the steel runways, where horses and men and paraphernalia resolved themselves into one great, teeming mass, other wagons were trundling down the long chutes from the flat cars, to be drawn, truckling and bumping, like the roar of low thunder, upon the hollow sounding wood of the planked causeways, which formed the railroad approaches of Midcurrent.

Now and then sounded the squealing trumpet of an elephant as the "bull-hook" of a keeper sank deep into the soft flesh behind his ear; or perhaps the gruff roar of a lion, sniffing the cold dampness of the early morning air from the bay. Spots of blue-white, the acetylene torches flared more and more dimly against the growing gray of the cloudy sky. Men shouted, and hurled uncomplimentary remarks, one at the other, as they rushed onward with their work.

Here and there upon the bridge-like platforms, great teams of six and eight and ten horses, their drivers huddled on the backs of the wheel-steeds, pulled at the numerous reins and swore musically at the thousand and one things which can arise to vex a circus "skinner" in the throes of early morning unloading. But the swearing of the drivers was lost in a conglomeration of other invectives, of jumbled forms, of hurrying men and half frantic beasts.

Along the seemingly interminable platforms of heavy wooden plankings where lay

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the vari-colored cars of the Great Hippodrome Shows, the "pull-up teams," their drivers leaping over broken pieces of piling and débris, their horses faltering and stumbling, were dragging the heavy wagons across the connecting plates of the flat cars to the unloading runs, there to crash downward, while the "snub ropes," which kept them from running amuck and into the tide below, burned and sizzled at their hickory pinions, and while the big elephants, harnessed and waiting to draw them into place for the tractors and heavy teams to take them to the circus lot, fretted in shivering fear of the weakness of the bridge-like structures upon which they must work, and the unsteady supports beneath them. Everywhere was rushing chaos, noise, excitement and uncertainty.

For the Great Hippodrome, seeking ever the "maiden town" where other big circuses had not gleaned the dollars of the populace season after season, had sought to accomplish the almost impossible. Running on uneven rails, it had ground away the miles from Portland into new territory—for a big circus at least—at last to pull into the bebridged, ancient vestige of the old fur trade of the north, Midcurrent.

And Midcurrent was a town on stilts. Stilts—truly and veritably. Built in the days when the West was young, Midcurrent was not designed for circuses. Out upon the sand-pits, with never a firm foundation for a building or a road, the town rested upon piles, with bridges its only streets.

Miles and miles and miles planked above the shifting sands, with street-cars running on those planks, with the daily traffic of an overgrown city rumbling hollowly over endless bridges, with the basements of the buildings extending downward as far as the long stretches of the fir piles will reach—such a place was Midcurrent.

And to such a place, in its never-ceasing search for dollars, had the Great Hippodrome come.

Thus it was that as wagon after wagon descended from the great trains, to take up the room of the narrow causeways, the excitement grew more intense, the work harder. Sweating and shirt-sleeved in spite of the cool of the morning, Bill Furniss, the lot superintendent, rushed into the milling mass of work, swinging his arms, and shouting as he came.

"Where's the twenty-four-hour man?"

"Here!" A wrinkle-faced being turned, his eyes heavy from loss of sleep. "What's the row?"

"What's the row? Row enough. We're never going to get on that lot! It's nothing but sand—it'll never hold a tent if a blow comes. It'll——"

"Well, what're you goin' t' do?" The half-frantic twenty-four-hour man stared aimlessly. "There ain't any other place! Where you goin'—up there on th' top o' that mountain? That's where the contractin' agent tried to put us, an' I seen in a minute when I got in here yesterday that we never would have no luck gettin' up there! It'd kill every horse we've got. So what else can I do but put you down there in that sand-pit?"

The lot superintendent waved his arms again.

"Maybe so!" he snorted. "But will you tell me how we're going to get this show on there? It takes six hundred feet to put 'er on and we've got four hundred down there. What do you think this show is, an accordion?"

"Well," the twenty-four-hour man had begun to seethe also, "you're a lot superintendent, ain't you? You're one o' these here guys that's supposed t' have resource. Why don't you get it out an' use it? Why——"

Whereupon the conversation degenerated into one of harsher words and personal invectives.

The milling activity about them grew more intense. More wagons ganged on the causeway. A plank broke, under the strain of the heavy hippopotamus den, sending it careening dangerously near the railing of the bridge-like street, while elephants thundered their fears and men shouted and struggled harder than ever.

The teams, the roaring tractors, awaiting the work that suddenly had been stopped by the lot superintendent, massed in the planked arteries leading from the runs. Here and there tore the trainmaster, his voice foghorning orders, none of which could be obeyed. Demoralization had begun.

For once, the smooth efficiency of the great circus, accustomed to almost every difficulty, was sagging—and breaking. Men cursed one another, purely from lack of anything else to accomplish. The lot superintendent shook his fist under the

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nose of the twenty-four-hour man. The twenty-four-hour man retaliated. Workmen gathered closer, leaving the labor of unloading to make their bets on the fight that seemed sure to come. Stronger became the words between the quarreling lot superintendent and the twenty-four-hour man. A fist doubled. The lips of the lot superintendent snarled from his teeth. Quickly he drew back an arm to strike. And then—

A sudden quieting. The fist loosed its tensity. The twenty-four-hour man moved a hand to his hat in quick salute. Beyond the runs a tractor suddenly maneuvered into place to attach itself to one of the waiting wagons. Razorbacks, or workmen of the train, leaped to their tasks at the cars. Teamsters wheeled their horses into activity.

"Shorty" Boggs, the elephant tender, rough and brutal a moment before, suddenly became solicitous of his tremendous charges, nursing them into place before the wagons and nursing them away again.

The swearing disappeared. Men talked in low tones, and their work suddenly became the smooth, quick, effective work of a well-oiled machine. Wagons moved, almost mysteriously. Commands came quickly, to be obeyed as rapidly. And all because of one snapping little sentence, given with a crispness that seemed to permeate everything, and metamorphose it:

"All right, gentlemen! Time's short. Let's go!"

THAT was all. But it had been enough, and for just a second, the wiry little being who had changed chaos into crackling, effective activity, stood watching the scene before him, his sharp little eyes peering out from above the high-turned collar of his big mackinaw, his little arms rammed almost to their elbows in the capacious pockets, his checkered cap pulled low over his forehead.

Then with a glance, which seemed to encompass everything at once, he turned to the lot superintendent and the twenty-four-hour man.

"Well, kids," he asked with a grin, "what's the row?"

"Row?" The twenty-four-hour man grinned in spite of himself, grinned with the infectious grin of the man before him. "Well, I guess there's plenty, Cap. The contracting agent had us figured for a lot away back there on the hill, out of the downtown district, where we never could pull up them wagons. So I had to switch, and do the best I could. An' I guess that's sure bad!"

"It sure is!" Bill Furniss smiled also. "But I guess we've got to make it. I'm willing to do my share."

"All right!" The little man jerked his checkered cap a bit farther over his eyes. "Now, what are we up against?"

"Plenty!" Bill half swung about and watched a wagon as it started its trailing way to the lot. "We haven't got room for the menagerie for one thing. We'll have to show in a sand-pit about ten feet below the level of the street. The sand's too deep for all the wagons to go down—there's a runway all right, but after they get down there, it'd take all the horses on the show to haul 'em into place. There's only room for the big tent. But we can manage that all right. What we need is men."

The little man jerked a match from a pocket and broke it to bits with a queer, quick little motion, as though the action helped his thoughts. Then carefully he placed the particles into one cupped hand and tossed them into the air, watching them intently until they scattered themselves on the ground. Whereupon he turned sharply.

"Mason," he ordered of the twenty-four-hour man, "grab a wad of tickets and tear up and square the commissioner of streets to let us leave our wagons on the big bridge. Tell him we'll open all the menagerie cages and make them free to the public. That ought to put it over. Then scare up all the kids you can to tear in and help with the extra work. Hear me? Scamper!"

The twenty-four-hour man ducked his head and hurried away.

The little man of the checked cap turned again and, cupping his hands, shouted toward a well-dressed man sauntering forward by the side of the sleeping-cars.

"Calhoun!" he called.

The stride of Clint Calhoun, equestrian director, quickened. A moment more and he was facing his superior, who waved a hand toward the sleeping-cars.

"Get back there and roust out all them bum actors. Quick! Tell 'em to put on their old clothes. They're goin' to work today—we're up against it. Report to Bill Furniss with the whole bunch in half

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an hour. If you see McCandless down there, tell him I want every one of his candy butchers too. Now, shoot!"

A second more and Calhoun was rushing toward the cars. Quickly the little man swerved again and his sharp, shifting eyes took in once more the work of unloading. Then he turned once more to his lot superintendent.

"Well," he asked, grinning, "what're you waiting for, Bill? Ain't a hundred and fifty extra hands enough?"

Bill Furniss straightened.

"That'll help," he answered, "I'll get 'er on—someway. I'm gone!"

Whereupon, Bill Furniss, happy in a new lease on his circus life, turned determinedly toward the circus grounds, while "Flinty" McNeall of the checked cap, owner of the Great Hippodrome Circus, whistled a bit, looked again at the hustling activity of unloading, then wandered amiably toward his private car and a belated breakfast.

Ten minutes later, seated at the sparkling little table in his car, Flinty McNeall watched, with all-engrossed interest, the stolid activities of a more stolid Finn as he splashed about the logging pool of a lumber mill, across the way, harnessing the great hulks of wood and starting them on their jolting journey up the runways toward the saws and planers beyond.

It was all quite interesting to Flinty—almost interesting enough to take precedence over the odor of frying ham and eggs from the kitchen, where his servant was preparing his breakfast.

But for that matter, all the world was interesting to Flinty McNeall. It always had been, ever since he, with a twin brother looked upon it for the first time in the dressing tent of the Great Hippodrome in the days of his father and mother, when the Great Hippodrome traveled by wagon, its courses marked along the country roads by night by means of white-painted rails and torn bits of paper.

That had been less than forty years before, but every day of the time had been interesting. The show had changed since then, changed from a small, struggling thing, to a tremendous organization of men and animals and a million dollars. The father and mother and the twin were gone too, leaving only Flinty—Flinty, so named in the days of his youth when the life of the circus had strengthened his muscles into steel strips, and made his heart as soft as his name was hard.

Less than forty years—but they all had been good years, good years of toil, of hardships, of enough clouds to bring a proper appreciation of the sunshine of work and of success.

And so with it all Flinty McNeall had come into a little niche all his own in the show-world, the niche of a man who could be soft-hearted and yet a ruler of men, who could do more with a smile than ten other men by invectives, yet a man who could fight till the last breath was drawn, who had earned his million before forty and who was just beginning to feel his power and his strength of life.

Such was Flinty McNeall, who sat in his private car, watching, with almost boyish interest, the work of the stolid Finn across the waters, and awaiting breakfast.

An hour later Flinty McNeall reached for his checkered cap, surveying meanwhile the mackinaw of early morning.

"Don't guess I'll need that," he murmured with a little glance out at the sky, "it's getting warmer. Maybe the sun'll come out after a while."

He turned, then stopped. He patted his pockets and gazed about the car in an abstracted manner.

"Where's my mouth-organ, Whitey?" he asked at last. "I'm liable to need it. Things are apt to be going pretty rocky up at the lot."

With a smile, "Big Whitey", his servant, took the cheap, tin-covered little musical instrument from a pigeon-hole of the desk and handed it to the show-owner. Flinty McNeall grinned good-naturedly, stuffed the harp into a pocket, and whistling happily, made his way to the circus lot.

But there things were not going so well. In spite of the hundreds of extra workmen, in spite of the showers of small boys who had descended into the circus lot to aid in anything their strength allowed, the speed of putting up the tents had slowed perceptibly. Flinty McNeall took one look, then shouted for Bill Furniss.

"It's the sand," the superintendent explained. "They can't drag through it. Wears 'em out. We're doing the best we can—but it's hard pulling!"

Flinty grinned up at the red face of the lot boss and set his cap back a bit on his head.

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"Guess I'll have to start things," he said. "What's going the slowest?"

"The big top gang."

Flinty squinted, then hurried forward, to where sweating, toiling men were dragging themselves through the sand in their efforts to spread and lace the canvas of the main tent. Slowly, the show-owner took from his pocket the cheap, tin-covered little mouth harp, and patted it affectionately on the palm of one hand.

Then, with a grimace, he put it to his lips and pulled a deep breath through its sounding reeds. A foot began to tap in the sand, his eyes began to sparkle and his cheeks to puff and contract. Near by, a negro, toil-worn and sweating, raised high his arms as a tremendous grin spread over his shining face. He kicked a foot in the air. He shook his shoulders as though to free them of the burden that had rested there.

"Dar she goes!" he shouted. "Dar she goes! Dass hit! Now we travel, dass what we do. Ah'm tellin' de world we travel! Swing-g-g to hit, black men, shake a leg, shake a leg an' le's go!"

Thereupon, with his body swaying to the rollicking music, he leaped again to his task, chanting the words of the melody as it flowed from the mouth-organ. Another joined him in the quick-spirited song, and brought the speed of their work into unison with the speed of the music. Another and another and another, until at last the whole, great crew, regardless of the sand, regardless of the difficulties, turned to their work with a rush that knew no abating.

Piece by piece the canvas spread, while Flinty McNeall, millionaire, played on. One by one, the poles went into place, while Flinty veered from "Money Musk" to the "Arkansaw Traveler," on through "Turkey in the Straw" and "Pop Goes the Weasel." For it was this thing, this communion, this personal equation that made men willing to work their fingers to the bone for Flinty McNeall.

A HALF hour. Then shouts sounded, muscles strained at ropes and the great tent began to rise. All over the circus lot, a new activity seemed to spring into being. From the big hill across the way, where the planked street rose in a hideous grade to meet the still steeper angle of the half-mountain road beyond, came the droning sound of the tractor, pulling its last wagon into position. Flinty looked up, nodded his head to the music, grinned, puffed his cheeks for a new and stronger strain—then leaped forward, his arms outspread, his voice shrieking:

"Look out—look out there! Out of the way on that hill—out of the way!"

But the crowd of the street, milling behind the wagon, had already heard the crackling snap of the broken coupling as the heavy wagon tore loose from the tractor and started on its wild race down hill. Already men and women and children were scattering, screaming, running aimlessly like the remnants of a disturbed ant-hill.

Wildly Flinty shouted again, then stopped—still and staring. The great wagon suddenly had veered in its course, and scattering the fear-maddened persons about it, had crashed through the railing, over the embankment and into the sand of the circus lot.

And near where its scattered poles and paraphernalia had thrown themselves, Flinty saw the form of a young woman waver, stagger a step or two, and fall.

He leaped forward now, pushed away the eager, curious townspeople who had escaped, and made his way to the figure in the sand. His foot struck something, and he looked down involuntarily, to see, half hidden in the soft ground, an old-fashioned pocket-book, of a style of years far gone. Quickly he snatched it up and went on. A second more and he was by the side of the girl, and kneeling to lift her up.

She was breathing, but unconscious, while half across her body lay the ridge-pole that had felled her. Just under the edge of her hair, where it strayed from her temple, a long welt was slowly reddening, to tell the story of the blow, and to give hint at danger of concussion or of fracture.

Quickly Flinty drew back the eyelids, and breathed a bit easier. Neither concussion nor fracture showed its reflexes in the pupils, but nothing was sure yet. The little show-owner turned anxiously.

"Where's Doc Briarson?" he snapped.

"Coming up!" came a voice, and a form wriggled its way through the thronging crowd, to kneel by the side of the showman. Hastily he worked, hastily he examined.

"We're lucky!" he said at last. "Only a slight concussion at the worst. Get

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somebody to take her over in the dressing-room and I'll have her all right in a couple of hours. Gee, she's pretty, isn't she?"

Flinty McNeall had been thinking the same thing. In spite of her stillness, there was a little something of the wild about her, something in the way that her hair caught the every glint of the faint sun, the way that it strayed and fell, naturally, and beautifully, about her smooth, clear-skinned features, and her well-rounded shoulders.

Her clothing was poor, the clothing that one wears when one lives far from the stores of fashion; her shoes were scurfed and lacerated, as though by the stones and rough pathways of the mountains. The lips were gray now, but they would be red and full with the pulsing strength of life.

Involuntarily Flinty leaned forward, and taking one of her cold, small hands in his, chafed it to warmth, as he called his orders to the workmen for a canvas stretcher—and for speed. Then solicitously, he turned again to the doctor.

"That welt ain't going to jim her up any is it, Doc?" he asked slowly. "That'd be a rotten shame. Gee, she's a Darby, ain't she? She can't be much more'n twenty-one or so, can she?"

"Not much." The doctor took her hand from between Flinty's and felt the faltering pulse. "What'd you say about that welt? Oh, that's all right—it'll go away. The skin isn't even broken. Wonder if anybody knows her?"

He glanced concernedly about him, but the faces of the narrow circle were only the faces of the unknowing curious. Flinty groped hastily for his pocket.

"Here's her purse," he said as he opened the hasp. Then his breath came quickly and he moved closer to the doctor. "She's heeled all right! Don't let that crowd up there see—look here!"

He held the pocketbook, shaded with his hands so that only the doctor could see within. Rolled tightly within the old-fashioned bag was a heavy roll of bills, while beside them rested a tiny locket, a pawn ticket, and an old, yellowed calling-card, of the flowing, hand-script engraving of twenty years ago. Gingerly Flinty drew it forth and stared at it.

"That don't tell us anything," he said at last. "Hey, you!" he rose and restoring the purse to his pocket, waved a hand toward the hurrying men approaching with the stretcher. "Get with it—we got to hurry!"

Then, as the men pushed their way through the steadily increasing crowd, to place the unconscious girl on the stretcher and bear her toward the improvised dressing-room, Flinty McNeall again took the long purse from his pocket, and again stared at the contents.

"That's a funny hunch," he said to himself. "A lot of money, a pawn ticket, a bum baby-locket and a calling-card a million years old, with the name, James Darling, Kansas City, on it. I wonder what he's got to do with her, and what she's lugging around his card for, anyhow?"

II

IT WAS just after the noon hour that Doctor Briarson, surgeon and physician of the Great Hippodrome, approached Flinty, standing beside Dickson, his manager, watching the rushing work of the erection of seats in the big-top, or main tent. The little show-owner turned quickly.

"Well," he asked, "how's the patient?"

"Excited," came the laughing answer. "She wants her pocketbook."

"Don't blame her," answered Flinty. "If I was carrying around a roll of dough big enough to choke a horse, I'd want my hands on it too. How's she getting along? Hurt much?"

The doctor squinted his eyes and with one foot made a meditative furrow in the sand.

"No. That's the funny part about it. She's all right, able to walk and all that sort of thing; of course her head aches a good deal, but that'll quiet down after a while. She's all right as far as I can see, but I can't get her to leave the dressing-tent."

"Can't get her to leave? Is she stallin' for a settlement or anything of the kind—faking an injury?"

"No."

"Then what's the reason?"

"Search me." The doctor laughed again. "She seems excited about something—but she won't own up to it. Her heart's beating about fifty miles a minute and the pupils of her eyes show a distinct nervous strain."

"Maybe it's due to the accident." Flinty perked his head to watch the sections of the seat gang. "Any woman's liable to

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get a bit off the running when a four-ton wagon tries to sit on her."

"Maybe it isn't too," came slowly from the doctor, widening the furrow that his foot had made in the sand. "There's something peculiar about that girl."

"What, for instance?" Flinty McNeall took a sudden interest.

"Well, that money, for one thing."

"Anybody's liable to have money."

"Yes, but anybody's not liable to have a couple of thousand dollars rolled up in a twenty-year-old pocketbook, and go wandering around with it the way she was. And a girl as pretty as this girl is wouldn't be neglecting those looks by wearing home-made clothing—not with all that money. I can't make it out."

Flinty grinned a queer, lopsided little grin.

"Doc," he said, "you and me think about the same things every now and then. What's she got to say for herself? What's her name? What's——"

The doctor spread his hands.

"You can't prove anything by me. I don't know!"

"But didn't you ask her name?"

"Did I? About a hundred times."

"Well?"

"She either fenced away from me, or wailed about that pocketbook, or asked if she could just stay in the dressing-room and rest until night. Or some other fool thing. Anything to get out of telling who she was."

Flinty McNeall fished deep into a pocket for a piece of gum, unwrapped it slowly, then nibbled abstractedly. Finally he waved toward Dickson, the manager.

"I've got to beat it for a little while," he announced. "If you need me for anything, I'll be in the dressing-tent."

Slowly he crossed the lot to the canvas-partitioned place beneath the planked street that formed the improvised dressing "tent" of the actors. There, seated upon a trunk, he found a huddled little being, her hair straying wild and unnoticed across her face, her hands clasping nervously, her eyes watching, watching, watching—every move of the actors, every billowy motion of the canvas side-wall, her head turning first to the right then to the left, never still, never ceasing in its vigilance.

Hers was the manner of a deer in a thicket, watching, listening, as the dogs bay in the distance, wondering where to run for safety, seeking flight—yet standing still through the magnetism of fear.

Flinty McNeall paused just a second as her eyes caught his, and sought to fathom them. Then he reached toward his pocket and approached her, the purse outstretched.

"The doc said you were asking about this," he began. "I thought it was safer——"

The exclamation of gratitude cut short the sentence. Her hands reached for the old-fashioned thing of leather and silver, and clasping it almost tremblingly, she unfastened the hasps with hurried, agitated fingers.

Flinty McNeall, watching her through narrowed eyes, saw that she hardly noticed the money—it was a certainty that she did not pause to count it. But what Flinty did see was that her main concern was for the pawn-ticket, the locket and the old, yellowed card.

And with this assured, she closed the worn hasps of the purse and looked up with a bit of a smile.

"Thank you," she said simply.

Flinty McNeall felt a sudden wave of embarrassment encompass him, and remembered that he still wore his cap. Hastily he grabbed for it, and swinging it at his side, grinned boyishly.

"Beg pardon," he managed to say. "A guy never thinks of taking off his hat around the lot here. You see——"

"It's all right," she looked up at him with a queer little expression on her features. "I've never been used to it."

"No?" Flinty felt that he had made a beginning. "I guess that's right. I guess these big fellows up around these logging camps are a good deal like us guys on the circus. They never have time to think about a lot of the things that go to make up all this fussy stuff. Of course, when the season's over and I get into a hotel or something like that in the Winter, I kind of spruce up a bit—do like the other folks do, you know. But——"

THEN Flinty McNeall suddenly ceased. He realized that something in the piquancy of her face, something in her shy, yet confident manner, something in the whole being of her was leading him on, not to talk about the things he had meant to talk about at all.

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Flinty had come to ask questions and to solve a problem of identification. He braced suddenly and veered the topic.

"Now about that little bump you got——"

She smiled at him again.

"It doesn't amount to anything. In fact, I'm rather glad it happened."

"Yes, of course—that is—" Flinty took another brace on himself—"we're all glad—that it ain't any worse than it is. I was pretty badly fretted up when I seen that smash on your temple. Gone down any?"

"Yes—a good deal."

She lifted her hair at the temple and Flinty bent forward. But he hardly glanced at the red mark, which slowly was lessening in its intensity. He was noticing that her profile as she turned her head away from him, was as regular as though it had been chiseled, that her lashes were long and pretty, that her lips curled in just the way that Flinty liked lips to curl, and that they were full and red and pretty. With the realization of which, Flinty suddenly determined to proceed to more business-like things.

Flinty's education in conversation with women had been limited largely to complaints at the front entrance, or the settlement of controversies between various members of the feminine element of the spangles and sawdust. It never before had included any one exactly like the little being of the spun-gold hair, who sat smiling, yet disconsolate on the trunk before him.

So Flinty, to be safe, again straightened and jammed his cap under one arm.

"Suppose fifty dollars would be about right?"

"Right? For what?"

"For the smash-up. We don't jim nobody up around this circus without trying to fix it all right. So if you say fifty dollars, I'll make out the release and give you the cash and some passes to the show for your friends and——"

"Please don't."

She looked about her quickly and rising, laid a hand on Flinty McNeall's arm. The touch thrilled him slightly—he did not know why. It was Flinty McNeall's first thrill. Outside, the bugle was calling for parade. The dressing-tent was deserted, deserted except for the man and the girl, and she was looking into his eyes with an appeal that was new to Flinty McNeall.

"Please don't," she repeated. "I don't want your money. I just want——"

"What?" Flinty asked the question abruptly.

She had turned away slightly, but now she swerved quickly to him, and the old look was in her eyes, the look of the deer in the thicket.

"I just want to stay here until night," she begged. "I'll not be in any one's way. I'll get away over in a corner and stay there. Then I'll go away. Please, won't you let me do that?"

"But——"

"I can't tell you why—except that I'm afraid—of somebody. It's—" her voice dropped lower—"it's somebody that I don't want to know where I've gone, until I've attended to certain things and until I feel that I'm safe. Please—" the voice became piteous—"please, won't you help me?"

The old boyishness returned to Flinty McNeall. He reached for his cap, and again swung it at his side. He grinned, in an embarrassed manner. Then he became suddenly serious.

"And I'm to keep my mouth shut—is that it?"

"Please!" Her grasp on his arm tightened.

Flinty stared at the ground.

"I ain't quite used to this sort of thing," came at last, and the words were involuntary. "We run against a lot of funny stuff in the show game, but this one's a new one on me. Look here—" his voice took a sharp twinge—"you ain't ducking some guy you're married to, or anything like that?"

"No."

"Thanks." Flinty spoke dryly. "Not that it was any of my business. But I might as well come clean and lay my cards on the table. We jimmed you up with that wagon today, and we owe you some kind of a settlement. But that don't make us no protective bureau if they's anything going on that shouldn't.

"Now, playing 'em right straight across the board, here's my cards: you don't belong in this town, because nobody knew you. You ain't dressed like a queen of fashion, begging your pardon for saying it, and yet you're carting around a roll of bills that would make a gambler sick. You ain't given out a hint of anything about

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yourself, from your name to your location. So, I'm going to ask one question, and that's whether you're crooked!"

"Crooked?" The look of horror in her eyes made Flinty McNeall ashamed of himself. "You—you didn't really think that, did you? You——"

Then she turned and her head bowed slowly. For a long time she was silent. Then at last she raised her eyes and her lips moved slowly.

"I—I don't know any way to prove that I'm not," was her answer. "I haven't a friend, I haven't a single person in the world that I can go to, or that I can bring here. I haven't—" her lips quivered and Flinty could see the beginning of tears in her eyes—"I haven't anything. I'm just——"

A cough interrupted her, the cough of a man mentally disturbed. Flinty McNeall was swinging his cap in a different way now, and he too was staring at the ground.

"Never mind the rest," he said at last. "I'm going to take your word for it. If it ain't true, you'll be the loser, not me. But that ain't neither here nor there. Stay here until the show goes out tonight, if you want to. If anybody asks you any questions, tell 'em that I told you to stay here and rest, and that you're waiting for me to fix up your settlement."

She put forth her hand and Flinty McNeall took it in his. Then he grinned.

"And, if you don't mind taking a tip from a circus guy, you might jar loose with a little more information than you're doing. Anybody but the doc asked who you were?"

"No."

"All right. If anybody else comes piking around for information, tell 'em you're Sally McGinnis and that you came down from the nearest logging-camp for a day's rest and recreation. Telling it to you straight, there ain't nothing that gets a person so excited as not getting the information they want. Get me?"

She laughed, genuinely, for the first time.

"Thank you," she said, and withdrew her hand gently. "I—I'm not very well versed, am I?"

"Well," and Flinty McNeall perked his cap over his eyes again, "You ain't any knockout at the artful stuff, if you'll pardon me for saying it. Now here's a camp-chair. Take it over there in that corner and enjoy yourself."

THEN he left the dressing-room, still a vestige of the grin shining on his lips. But outside, as he trudged his way through the sand toward the big top, the grin faded, his head sank between his shoulders, and his hands sought their ever-present refuge in the deep recesses of his pockets.

Skirting the big-top, he looked within, saw that the work was progressing satisfactorily, then walked far across the lot, to where a broken pile of weathered timbers reared themselves against the piling of the street. Absently he climbed high upon them and sat for a long time, staring abstractedly about the circus lot.

Then, very slowly, he dragged his mouth-organ from a pocket and began to play. But the result was tuneless, distracted. Flinty McNeall was striving to down his curiosity, and curiosity to Flinty McNeall was second nature. It is the life of the showman, the thing that leads him into the business, that sends him forth season after season, to see what the next will be like, that shoots him here and there about the globe in search of the elusive novelty, that makes him a wanderer, a man of research and a success or failure in the game of life.

And today Flinty McNeall had done something entirely outside his category. He had faced a problem, and failed, almost voluntarily, to solve it.

Why should a girl, dressed poorly, with only the evidences of a fair education, be possessed of money, seemingly amounting to more than a thousand dollars, yet be friendless, alone and afraid? Why the pawn ticket? Why should she be in a crowd about a circus lot, yet be afraid to go forth until night? Why should she be unknown, yet seemingly fearing every one? Why. . . .

"Why does a duck fly?" Flinty McNeall asked at last in disgust. "I give it up, the whole thing. There I had to go and play the soft-hearted boob like I always do, and fuss around and make a lot of promises just because she was pretty and—and—but gosh!" he confessed. "She sure was pretty! I never saw a girl like her before.

"I—hey there! Full-house! Tie off that guy-rope on that third stake. Then tear in and tell Bill Furniss that I said to rush things on them seats. The parade's coming back to the lot now and we'll have to open the doors almost as soon as it gets here.

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We ain't got any menagerie to hold the crowd today. Hurry!"

And with the command, Flinty McNeall was descending from the pile of old lumber to face other problems than those of the girl in the dressing-tent. The bugles and band of the parade were sounding the approach to the lot. More, within a half hour, the crowds were milling through the front gates and into the big tent of the circus.

And crowds that were hard to handle, crowds which needed the watchful eye of the manager, his assistant, the detectives, the owner—everybody who could be spared from within to look out for the comfort and convenience of the thousands who jammed and pushed and surged in their efforts to get within the tent.

From Coos Bay and Marshfield, from hills and fens, from the logging-camps and lumber-mills and salmon fisheries they had come, from the far stretches of the Columbia, Finns and Slavs and Polacks, Norwegians and Swedes; here and there a Chinese or Japanese, seldom an American—all of them imbued with the one idea, to see this thing that needed two trains to carry it, this "sar-kus" that had flaunted its wonders for weeks ahead on every barn and fence and building wall for forty miles around.

Of the conventionalities, they knew nothing. Their whole idea was to pay, then go inside. Out at the ticket-wagon the treasurer and his assistants were striving vainly to bring understanding to the stolid ones who crowded about it. Interpreters shouted in a Babel-like conglomeration of languages. Hundreds—thousands, failing in their efforts to buy tickets, passed through the gates, dropping their dollars in the hands of the attendants as they came.

Men bought reserved-seat tickets—then sat on the general admission seats. Others walked into the tent, stared about, wondered what it all meant, then went forth, believing they had seen what purported to be the show. Others gathered about the band-stand, refusing to take their seats—motioning with grins and gruff laughs that the ground was good enough for them.

Frightened women, with more frightened children, hurried here and there, losing one another, screeching names, running hen-like about the great enclosure, until corraled by the ushers and sent to their seats. It was the first time that a real circus ever had been to Midcurrent—and Midcurrent was enjoying it thoroughly.

Everywhere was excitement and rush and hurry. Here and there shot Bill Furniss, examining the jacks and supports of the seats, built upon their shifting foundation of sands. Forward and backward, from the pad-room to the front entrance, went Dickson, the manager, returning a lost child to its mother now, directing the placing of the "props" or paraphernalia of the circus, shouting orders, and executing half of them himself. At the entrances, Flinty McNeall, swamped by inquiries, requests, excitement and turmoil, had become a human directory. And thus an afternoon of difficulties began.

Difficulties in the handling of the crowds, difficulties in the giving of the afternoon performance, difficulties caused by sand which permeated everything, difficulties engendered by an inexperienced audience, which leaped to its feet in its enthusiasm, causing the hearts of Flinty and his assistants to thump like trip-hammers at the thought of the frail supports of the shifting sands, and the dangers of falling seats.

BUT some way, at last, it all was over. One by one, almost personally, the great audience had been shunted out of the canvas, with the shouted announcements that if they cared to see the circus again, they could come that night and pay another admission.

The concert trailed through to its conclusion, and the stragglers who had remained to see it trundled forth at last to the long planked streets of the little town, while Flinty McNeall hurried forth to the problems of the evening.

One by one he found his bosses and gave his instructions for the night. A hurried trip to the cook-house, already half-denuded of its tables and benches in the rush to load for the night, where Flinty gulped a cup of coffee and a sandwich, meanwhile giving an order to a waiter that something be taken to the huddled figure in the dressing-tent—almost forgotten until this moment. Then the little show-owner started forth toward the planked street where rested the menagerie.

He glanced at the sky. The sun had gone down behind the little range of hills,

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and the early, quick-falling dusk was approaching. Flinty glanced about him, then motioned for Shorty Boggs, the animal man.

"You can begin shutting up these cages," he ordered. "It'll be too dark along this street inside five minutes for anybody to see what's in 'em anyway. Let 'em get started down to the train. We're going to be needing every minute we can gain tonight if we're going to get off the lot. And if we can get this menagerie out of the way before the night show starts, we're just that much to the good."

Shorty megaphoned the orders. There came the sound of planks and boards and sliding doors as the menagerie cages were closed for the night, the clanking of lead chains and dragging double-trees as the great teams came into place to start the wagons to the cars. Flinty watched for a while, and then as the last vestige of day faded, he started down toward where the glaring torches were beginning to flare on the circus lot.

The crowd already was beginning to gather for the night show. In front of the side-show, where the ballyhoo men were shouting of the wonders to be seen within, all for a dime, ten cents, a heavy knot of men and women and children had clustered, and Flinty mingled with them.

Flinty liked that—it was one of his diversions—to stand in front of a side-show "grind" and listen to the things the people talked about and wondered about and thought. So Flinty mingled—suddenly to start forward, and swing his way through the jam toward a ticket-taker.

"What'd that cop want?" he asked hurriedly. His head was slanted and his sharp eyes were peering out from beneath the low rim of a cap toward a brass-buttoned figure hurriedly fading across the circus lot. The ticket-taker leaned forward.

"Who—him?" he asked. "Oh, he just wanted to know what had become of that there dame we hurt with the wagon this morning. Said a friend of his wanted him to look her up."

"Well?" Flinty's voice snapped the question. "What'd you tell him?"

"I told him the truth. There wasn't any frame-up on it, was there? I told him I wasn't sure, but I'd heard some o' the performers say that she was restin' over in th' dressing-tent. So he said he guessed he'd just mosey over and talk to her."

"Oh, is that so?" Flinty's face had gone hard. "How long have you been in the show game?"

"Ten years."

"Then you'd better be getting out of it, if you ain't got enough sense to keep your mouth shut!" It was one of the few times that any one on the Great Hippodrome had seen Flinty McNeall genuinely angry. "When a cop wants to find out anything about this trick, you send him to me."

"But I didn't know—"

"Oh, close your trap!" answered Flinty disgustedly as he started across the circus lot on the trail of the policeman.

But it was a long, hard drag. There were pits in the sand, there were obstacles, and Flinty's delay at the ticket-stand had given the policeman too great a start. It was not until the officer, swinging aside the canvas entrance, had stalked into the dressing-tent and was staring about him, that Flinty was able to reach him. Then, panting somewhat from his long pull through the sand, the little owner hurried to the side of the man in blue and brass and tugged at his sleeve.

"I'm the owner here. What's up?" he asked sharply. "There ain't nobody allowed in these dressing-rooms without seeing me. I——"

The policeman sneered.

"But I'm in here, ain't I?"

"Yes, you're in. But if there's anything wrong around this show, I'm the fellow that you want to see about it. If you want to know anything about any of the performers——"

"Performers?" The policeman's eyes were roving the dressing-room. "I didn't say I wanted any of the performers, did I? I—" He suddenly bent over and peered toward a form that had hidden itself in the darkest corner of the canvas. "Hey, you over there in the corner, come out here. Yes, and hurry up!"

There was no answer. Several of the performers, busily making up, moved into the policeman's range of vision with that instinctive feeling of distrust of officials that exists in every circus person's heart. He swerved quickly. Flinty saw him reaching toward the bulging revolver beneath his coat flap. Again came the order.

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"Hear me? Come out of that corner—hey, somebody head that woman off—quick—out of my way there—out——"

For the corner of the side-wall had lifted quickly, and the small form of the girl had glided forth into the darkness, while the patrolman, fussing about in the maze of trunks and dressing-stands and lights, struggled clumsily to reach the place where the girl had vanished.

A moment more and he was at the side-wall, to lift it and to rush forth into the night. Flinty McNeall, suddenly thrilled by a feeling that he could not understand, hurried out the entrance of the dressing-tent and around it, just in time to meet the policeman as he stopped aimlessly in his rush, staring vainly about him.

As for the girl, she had vanished. Whether she had skirted the dressing-side-wall and hurried in the shadow of the big-top out into the crowd before the side-show, whether she had sought the tunnel-like darkness which extended under the planked street, whether she had hidden herself in the various piles of old lumber which lay in profusion about the lot, was impossible of conjecture. The delay of the policeman in the dressing-tent had been enough. In that moment, she had disappeared.

Vainly the officer, his flashlight gleaming, sought to track her in the sand. It was impossible amid the mass of footprints and hoof-holes which the trampling performers and animals had made there. She was gone, gone thoroughly and effectually, and some way, as Flinty McNeall realized it, he felt glad that she had made her escape. Why? Even Flinty McNeall could not answer.

III

HOWEVER, Flinty did not voice his sentiments. He accompanied the patrolman about the circus lot, peering here and there with him as the flash-light sent its circle of light about the various piles of lumber, the hummocks of sand, the recesses under the planked streets, the broken foundations of old buildings on the other side of the lot, and around the canvas.

At last the patrolman snapped the clasp which extinguished the lamp.

"Guess I've got to give it up," he said. "I never had any idea she'd do a thing like that. I thought I had her!"

"Been looking for her long?" Flinty McNeall was making the beginning toward a bit of information. "She ain't one of these arch-criminals or anything of the kind, is she?"

"Who? Her?" They were edging their way through the massing crowd which awaited the opening of the entrances for the night show. "I don't know much about her. But there ain't much doubt about her being crooked."

"No?"

"Hardly. When a person pawns twelve thousand dollars worth of diamonds for a couple of thousand beans, there's usually something doing. Solomon, the pawnbroker, stops me on my beat tonight and said he'd been worrying all day about this dame. Seems she'd just left his pawn-shop and was making a hot foot out of town when she got hurt.

"I guess if she'd gotten away all right this mornin', Solomon would ha' kept his mouth shut, but somebody that had seen the accident got to talkin' this afternoon and described the girl and that got him excited.

"Well, anyway, he grabbed me and made the howl about this girl pawning a big bunch of diamonds for almost nothin', and said she acted kind o' suspicious. So I came over here to find out what she had to say about it. You know the rest. I guess I'd better tear back to headquarters and make a report on the whole thing."

"Yep," Flinty McNeall looked at his watch, "and I'd better tear over there to the front entrance and get things started. It looks like we're going to have another one of those riots like we had this afternoon."

And so the rush of the night started, with another milling throng which piled through the front entrances of the Great Hippodrome for a view of its wonders. Again the fears and the excitement and the anxiety. Again Flinty McNeall moved from the front entrance to the pad-room and back again.

The *entrée*, or beginning of the show, came and went. The aerial acts veered into place, while hurrying property-men rushed forth the paraphernalia of the former acts to the waiting wagons, that they might be taken to the train and loaded for the run to the next town. The *haute école* came, the

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"mixed numbers"—act by act the show rushed on toward its conclusion. And as the Old Deadwood stage-coach, its Indians waiting for the signal to attack, hurtled into the hippodrome track, Flinty McNeall looked at his watch with a satisfied grin.

"Tear down to the train and tell them to look for everything on time," he ordered "Dutch" Stump, the boss hostler, "the way things are going, the performance'll be out a half hour ahead of time. That gives us an extra half hour for delays on the lot and it'll put everything at the train practically on the minute."

The hostler hurried away, while Flinty stood in the glare of the lights from within, watching the progress of the attack on the stage-coach. Around the sandy hippodrome track it went, to hear the twice daily repeated warning of the official announcer, then to careen onward again, suddenly to dash forward at the sound of shots as the Indians rushed to their noisy but ineffectual attack, only to scamper in retreat as the inevitable cowboys, six-shooters banging, came thundering to the twice-daily rescue.

It was one of the thrills of the circus, adapted from the Wild West shows, and with the tent making the sound of shot and shout all the louder by its echoes, it was thoroughly exciting and intense. And those two words are requisites in the land of the "white tops."

So Flinty stood in the area of light just beyond the "flags," or actors' entrance to the tent, and watched it all enthusiastically. The act had taken well with the lumberjacks and mill-workers and fishermen.

High on the seats, they were shouting and waving their arms and gesticulating in their excitement. Women were cringing at the recklessness of the riding, at the sight of "red-fire," now blazing within the stage-coach, at the crackle and roar of rifle and revolver. On and on went the stage-coach, finally to thunder out the entrance and roll past Flinty, the Indians following. Then came the cowboys, still pulling at the triggers of their revolvers.

And as they pounded forth from the flags, the fire of their weapons flashing high above the zone of light, Flinty heard a sudden scream from behind him. He turned quickly. A clown was there, almost at his elbow, doubled, his face showing pain even through the paint, one hand clutched over the fleshy part of an arm. A cowboy wheeled on his nervous horse.

"What's the row, Joey?" he asked.

The clown looked up angrily.

"Why don't you aim those guns up in the air?" was his sarcastic answer. "What d' you think we're made of, sheet iron?"

"What's the trouble, old kid? Some wadding hit you?"

"It's paralyzed my arm, that's all!" came the seething reply. "You're a fine bunch o' bums, you are. You——"

"Let me see that!" Flinty McNeall had noticed a red stain that was rapidly growing larger on the clown's sleeve. "Take your hand away!"

"Why my hand's bloody—" The clown stared wide-eyed. "It must have cut the skin some. I——"

"Come over here to the light!" Flinty's voice was snapping his orders now. "Buck!" he called to the cowboy. "Tear out and get Doc Briarson. Hurry!"

He led the clown into the full range of the light, then hastily jerked forth a knife and cut the sleeve from the injured arm. He bent quickly forward.

"That's a bullet-hole!" came shortly.

"A bullet-hole?"

"Just what it is—and it's gone all the way through. Hey you!" A property-man came forward at the command. "Reach into my hip-pocket and get my handkerchief. Now, hold steady, Joey!"

He raised the arm and motioned a property-man to hold it. Then with quick motions he began the fashioning of a tourniquet with the handkerchief and a pencil above the wound. Suddenly he jerked his head quickly in command and the figure came toward him.

"How'd this happen?" Flinty McNeall's usually placid voice was snapping.

Terry Branson, the property boss, edged nearer and stared.

"Why, it's a bullet-hole, ain't it?" he said wonderingly. "How'd it happen, Joey?"

"I punched it in there, o' course!" the clown answered seethingly.

"No, on the square, how did it happen?" Terry came closer in his curiosity.

"That's just what I want you to find out," Flinty McNeall interrupted as he tightened the tourniquet. "Who's buying the blank catridges for the Wild West act?"

"I am. Why?"

"Who's loading the guns?"

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"You mean, who's putting the cartridges in 'em? Me. I had 'Toughy' doing it for a while, but he forgot a couple o' times, so I look after it myself."

"Then this thing is right straight up to you." Flinty motioned as Doc Briarson approached. "We've got a clown shot here, Doc. Better take the treasury-wagon automobile and run him down to the cars. He can wash up down there."

Then, as the physician led the wounded clown away, Flinty again turned to his property boss.

"What I want to know, Terry, is how that bullet got in one of those Wild West guns. Joey was shot as the cowboys came out from the tent and——"

"Well, if there's been any bullets floating around, they must have gotten into the guns after I turned them over to the cowboys," was the heated answer of the property-man. "There wasn't anything but blanks when they got 'em from me. I know. Gosh, I ought to. I loaded every one o' those guns myself!"

"And you're sure a stray bullet didn't get mixed up with the bunch by mistake?"

"A bullet? Why, how could it, Cap?" The property-man spread his hands. "Gosh, I know a bullet from a blank cartridge! Besides, if I was doing the loading with my eyes shut, I could tell that! The weight would be enough. I——"

BUT Flinty McNeall had suddenly shot forward to half jerk into the range of light an aimless, stumbling figure that reeled and staggered as he groped his way forward. It was Jackson, the gray-haired old negro "flag-tender," whose business it was to shift the draw curtains at the actors' entrance as the various displays went through, now dizzily endeavoring to stand erect, and wiping the blood from his face where it flowed from a jagged cut on his forehead.

"Laws, Marse Flinty," he gasped. "Ah done thunk Ah's done fo'!"

"Done for?" Flinty's eyes were glittering with astonishment. "How did this happen? Terry!" he turned to the property-boss who had come to his side. "Get some water, quick! Here, Jackson, sit down a minute and come to!"

He led the aged, muttering old negro to his canvas camp-chair at the draw-ropes, then stood silent while the negro held his head and groaned, and while the property-man hastened for water.

Out before Flinty, the circus was flashing to its close. Over by the reserved seats, the band was blaring, while high upon the wires, the trapeze and the flying bars, the acrobats of the last aerial acts were thrilling the staring-eyed thousands who watched their every move.

Out there was pleasure and enjoyment and happiness. Here—here where one man had just been taken away with a bullet-hole through an arm, while another reeled from the staggering force of some mysterious blow, was—what? Flinty would have given a good deal to know.

The old negro straightened and again sopped with his bandanna at the tiny trickle of blood. A second more and he was blinking and spluttering as Terry Branson folded a cold, wet towel upon his head, cooling and reviving him. At last he rolled his big eyes at the anxious-faced show-owner. Then his heavy lips spread in a wide grin.

"Laws a massy, Marse Flinty! Yo' neveh even got skotched, did yo'?"

"I?" Flinty stared. "What're you talking about?"

Old Jackson waved his knotted hands.

"What's Ah talkin' about, Ah's ta kin' about dat po' low-down white trash what done tuk a pot-shot at yo', dass what!"

A sudden light flashed into Flinty McNeall's eyes.

"So that was it, eh? We thought it was an accidental bullet from a Wild West gun. What——"

"Accident nuffin! Didn't Ah done see him when he pulled de trigger? Didn't Ah done tuk out afteh him an' didn't he whang me on de haid an' lay me col'? Acc'dent? Dat wasn't no acc'dent!"

Flinty bent low.

"Get back to the beginning, Jackson," came his soft command. "Now, where did you see him and what did he look like?"

"Dass jes' hit. Ah neveh seen him. All Ah seen was jes' dis yere han' stick out wif a cannon in hit. Y'see, Marse Flinty, Ah was sittin' right yere an' Ah'd been lookin' oveh at yo'. Yo' was a-standin' about oveh there—" he pointed—"an' Joey Collins was a-comin' up behin' yo' t' go into de ring.

"Den, all a-sudden, jes' when de Wil' Wes' am comin' out, *blooey*, jes' laik dat, dey's a shot right above mah haid, an' Ah

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looks up an' sees a han' wif a gatlin' gun in hit, fadin' jes' away, where somebody'd stuck hit out on de otheh side o' de side wall an' tuk a shot at yo'.

"Well, up Ah jumps an' tuk out afteh him an' Ah ain't got no mo'n twenty feet when, *blam*, he turns aroun' an' smacks me on de haid wif his gun. An' right den, dass all Ah knows. De nex' thing Ah'm doin' is rammin' mah nose aroun' in de san', tryin' t' git up."

For a long moment, Flinty McNeall stood silent, gazing with unseeing eyes at the flashing circus before him. At last he rammed his hands deep into his pockets and turned to Terry Branson.

"Tell somebody to watch these draw curtains and then get one of your men to take Jackson down to the cars," he ordered. "He'll find Doc Briarson in the 'Champion' sleeper, fixing up Joey's arm. And never mind telling anybody any more than you have to."

"How about the police?" Branson was helping the injured negro to his feet.

"Gosh, I never thought of that." Flinty took a match from his pocket and broke it to bits meditatively. "Jackson, didn't you get any kind of a look at this fellow?"

"No seh. All Ah done was jes' see him."

"Well, couldn't you tell whether he was tall or short or anything like that?"

The old negro spread his hands again.

"Ah'd say jes' mejum. Mebbe he was tall, Ah dunno. Mebbe he was short. He was kind o' doubled up runnin'. An' den when he turned aroun' to wham me on de haid, Ah didn't have no chance fo' t' look."

Flinty McNeall twirled the bits of match into the air and watched them fall.

"I don't see where the police are going to make any knockout at helpin' us. We'll be gone from here in three hours. Maybe you'd better do it though, on account of Joey. If there should be anything wrong with him, blood poison or anything like that, we'd want to be protected. So take a flyer over to headquarters if you've got the time, will you?"

"Sure!" Terry nodded. "It'll only take a minute."

Whereupon, Flinty McNeall started forward, and, skirting the edge of the hippodrome track, made his way through the circus and to the ticket wagon. There he reached into a drawer of the treasurer's desk, slowly surveyed the black, shining metal thing he took therefrom, and crammed it into a hip-pocket.

"How's the sawed-off shotgun?" he asked. Henderson, the treasurer, did not look up from his work of counting money. It was the usual nightly question.

"All loaded."

"Who's going to help you down to the cars with the money?"

"Bill Storm, same as usual."

"Better put another man in the automobile. This is a saw-toothed town and we've taken in a lot o' money today."

"All right, sir."

FLINTY McNEALL left the ticket-wagon and returned to the blazing light of the circus. It had been an extremely profitable day for him; the dollars had flowed into the strong boxes of the treasury wagon by the thousands, and up there on the high-piled tiers of seats, men and women were grasping at every offering of concert tickets that they might prolong as much as possible this thing of wonders which had come among them.

But it all brought little joy to the diminutive figure of the hunched shoulders and serious face that stood just within the entrance. There were other things in the mind of Flinty McNeall, things to take away the joy of dollars and the honor of being a pioneer of circusdom in Midcurrent.

The day had been one of events far from peaceful, far from conducive to ease and comfort and contentment of mind. That seemingly innocent, beautiful little creature of the wild who had impressed him as no other woman ever had impressed him, only to baffle him and handle him like a person would handle an inquisitive child; finally to flee from the approach of the police like a criminal; that shot at the finish of the Wild West, aimed at him, he felt sure and not at the unfortunate clown who had been the victim of the bullet—the whole retrospect gave to Flinty McNeall a view of the day that was decidedly one of gloom.

More, it had been mysterious. A girl, a policeman, a shot in the dark . . . .

Flinty suddenly perked his head.

Could she have fired that shot during the Wild West? Could she have believed that he had set the police on her trail, and decided upon revenge? Could . . . Then Flinty McNeall just as suddenly gave up the thought. Old Jackson, the flag-tender, had

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said that the assailant had been a man, and that disposed of suspicion against the girl. Then who could it have been? And why? The question remained unanswered.

Long Flinty pondered, while the circus blared on to its noisy conclusion. Then, as the chariot races thumped and banged and jolted around the hippodrome track, while the crowds milled for the better seats of the concert, he shook his head and laughed slightly.

"It's got me," he murmured. "I can't figure it. I can't even start."

With which he shifted his automatic into a coat pocket and started forth to the work of the night.

Along the planked streets, the torches which marked the way to the cars were flaring and spluttering, and Flinty followed them, his wary eyes watching every person about him, his right hand shoved deep into his coat pocket. Block after block he went, finally to turn into the zone of light where the acetylenes glared and where rushing men and animals were leading the big circus for the night's travel.

The work was progressing well. Already the first section or train, of long, heavily-trussed flat cars, containing the menagerie, the cookhouse, the parade paraphernalia and other requisites not used in the night show, was loaded and shunted on the right of way.

At the "snack stand," the blackened little lunch counter run by the trainmaster, the actors were "feeding up" after their work of the night. Soon the lights would flicker out in the big top, with the end of the concert, and the last of the loading would be ready. Flinty, his survey over, sighed in satisfaction and started into the darkness toward his private car, far at the end of the train.

Past the flat cars of the first section he went, looking at the still, canvas-shrouded wagons as he walked along—the professional glance of the showman, ever anxious for the proper loading of valuable property. Then into the deeper darkness, to pick his way slowly toward his car.

The reflected glare of the far-away acetylenes faded entirely. The cars, dark and silent, uninhabited as yet by the actors and workmen, cast an even darker shadow upon his pathway. Piles of lumber shut off the dull light of the sky. Slower and slower grew his progress, slower and slower—

He stopped, transfixed, his every nerve jangling, his fingers gripped about the thing of steel and death in his pocket, his whole being strained in its every fiber, yet motionless. Before him, where one of the long piles of lumber lessened in its height, something seemed alive, something that crawled into the air—a hand, its fingers clutching and trembling, its jerking form rising with an involuntary, horrible, spasmodic motion.

For just a second it remained outlined against the dull sky, an ominous, haunting, deathlike thing—and then, even before Flinty McNeall could draw his automatic, and pursue, both the hand and its owner were gone, leaving behind a quivering, staring-eyed man whose white lips framed the name of one who had passed out of his memory years before:

"Good God! The 'Trembler'!"

IV

A SUDDEN, shuffling motion, then the hollow sound of pounding heels upon the planked trestleway—that had been all. In the deep shadow, Flinty, his automatic pressed forward, scurried here and there about the great piles of lumber, peering vainly into the dense shadow in his search for some vague outline of the man whose trembling hand had betrayed his presence.

Once his muscles had flexed after their sudden stiffening under the surprise which the shadow of the hand had cast upon him, Flinty had drawn his automatic and leaped forward.

But it had been too late.

Before, he had stood as one hypnotized by this shadowy, clutching thing which rose for the instant, not to recover from the deadening amazement until the motion of retreat had called him to a realization that this trembling, jerking, outspread thing was a part of a human, hated being, and not a specter after all. Then he had bounded to the attack, but the vision against the sky had departed.

Only one thing was certain—he had not gone in the direction of the loading-runs. There might have been a chance for detection in that event, but in the course he had pursued, there was none. On beyond the piles of lumber were quays and docks and the log-runs of the lumber-mills, each

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offering a thousand places to escape detection, each deep in shadows and vague forms in which discovery was impossible. And so, at last, Flinty McNeall, his heart pounding a bit from the excitement, gave up the search.

At least, he abandoned the hope of finding the owner of the trembling hand in that maze of shadows. From almost any place, except where the runs of the tide crept about the piles in tiny rivulets, a leap to the soft sand below could have been accomplished noiselessly, safely. There was just one thing to do, and Flinty did it quickly.

He whirled. He rushed swiftly along the lane of shadows into the zone of light at the runs. There he paused a moment to draw Tim Taylor, the trainmaster, to one side.

"Keep your lamps trimmed," he ordered tersely. "If a kind o' tall guy with a scar across his face and a hand that wiggles shows up around here, grab him! Understand? If you have to lay him out with a tent stake—grab him!"

Tim grinned.

"I'll get him, Cap," was his answer, and Flinty McNeall sped on. Ten minutes later the little show-owner veered from the hollow-sounding street along which he had hurried, to peer about him, then at last to turn into the narrow entrance of an official-looking building.

A moment later he was leaning over a desk, half slouched against it, his checkered cap cocked at a more acute angle, awaiting Midcurrent's chief of police. The sergeant, who had led him into the room, waved a hand cordially.

"Make yourself at home," he announced, "the chief's expected in 'mo t any minute now."

"Surest thing you know," answered Flinty, and as the sergeant left the room, the eyes of the little show-owner began to rove, staring at the placards, the reward bills, the . . . . .

He straightened in his position. His head went steadily forward. Out from the desk he went and across to the opposite wall.

There, glaring forth in the stud-type of a penitentiary notice, was a reward sheet which carried a picture he knew, and a description he never could forget as long as he lived:

$300 REWARD

FOR

ARREST AND RETURN TO OREGON STATE PENITENTIARY

OF

GEORGE JORDAN (*Alias* The Trembler)

Escaped from Oregon State Penitentiary, June 10, while serving a life sentence for murder.

Description: Five feet eleven inches in height; weight one hundred and seventy-five pounds; dark hair and complexion; brown eyes, irregular teeth, clean shaven, well built and muscular. Well educated, and shrewd in clerical work, etc., poses sometimes as a banker, but often has been known to take menial employment in seeking to escape arrest on other charges before his conviction for murder. At time of conviction was a victim of heroin habit and may have returned to the drug. Has followed the sea, and also has knowledge of logging-camps, etc. Had record of forgeries, robberies and confidence work when arrested.

Distinguishing marks: Long scar diagonally across face, which shows purple at times. Afflicted with nervous lack of control of left hand, which causes it to clutch involuntarily at times and extend itself with a jerking, trembling motion above his head.

ARREST AND WIRE WARDEN OREGON STATE PENITENTIARY

Flinty's face, as he finished the reading, was ashen white. His hands jammed themselves deeper than ever into his pockets.

"So the enemy's out, eh?" he said coldly, and then, with his usually happy face suddenly drawn and pinched, he turned to meet Midcurrent's chief, just entering his office. Flinty jerked a hand over his shoulder.

"I'm Flinty McNeall of the Great Hippodrome Shows," he said curtly. "Know anything about this fellow?"

"The Trembler?" The chief removed his coat and slouched into his chair. "Not much, except he's out and off to a clean getaway."

"You ain't got any trace of him around here?"

"Here? I should say not. He made it across the line into Mexico."

"And I'm betting that he's right in this burg now!"

"Now?" The chief swung in his chair. "Impossible!"

"Where d'you get that impossible stuff?" Flinty became slightly vehement. "Nothing's impossible for that bird. I've seen him!"

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"Here?"

"Well—" and Flinty hedged a bit on his remark—"I saw a part of him, anyway. Besides, there was a shooting on the show tonight."

"Yes. We're working on that. One of your men reported it. From what I can gather it was spite work—some fellow mad at another one and willing to wing him to settle things up."

"Maybe so," said Flinty McNeall. "Them things do happen—but not very often on my show. Anyway, it looked like a pot-shot at me, but it got another guy. And the Trembler promised me a shot in the back twenty years ago."

"You?"

"Me. I'm the guy that sent him over, and my twin brother's the guy he killed!"

The chief straightened a bit. He motioned toward a chair.

"Sit down," he ordered, but Flinty McNeall returned to his slouching position against the desk, his eyes staring, his hands twisting slightly.

"THAT'S the dirty thing about it—him killing a kid!" Flinty was living again the events of the years that were gone, and his eyes were the eyes of sorrow. "My brother and me were twins. We were about sixteen then, just overgrown punks, running around the circus-lot and learning what we could against the time when we'd have to run it ourselves, but that ain't got so much to do with the story. Anyhow, this guy showed up on the lot one day and started some petty larceny stuff—picking pockets. We grabbed him, Bob on one side, me on the other.

"Well, we got him to a copper and started him to the booby hatch. Then he broke and ran. The copper tried to catch him and fluked. He quit the job, but me and Bob didn't. Looking for a rough guy was pie for us.

"Along toward night we found him, hiding in a woodyard, down by the river—we were showing in Portland—and we started after him like a couple of hounds. He shot—twice. One of the bullets got Bob in the heart—" Flinty McNeall's words came slowly—"but the other one just nicked me in the leg, enough to keep me from trailing him.

"I tried to pick Bob up, to do something for him, and the Trembler got away. But they nailed him a couple of weeks later and my story sent him over. So, you see, I ain't got no love for him, Chief—and he hasn't got any for me. And what's more, as long as he's loose, I'm going to have something in my pocket besides a handkerchief."

The chief smiled.

"I think you can rest easy for the present. I don't believe he's even in this part of the country. As near as we can figure it, he's bound for Mexico, to stay there. A week after he escaped, we got a line on him at San Diego. He'd rolled some sucker there for fourteen hundred dollars on a wire-tapping deal and gotten out of town before the police could nab him. It's nearly a certainty that he went on through Tia Juana and is over on the other side of the line where requisitions don't count."

Flinty McNeall was busily breaking a match to bits. He tossed the remnants into the air and watched them descend—then stared at the scattered particles.

"I wish you was right," he said finally, "but I'm afraid you ain't. I just came away from seeing him!"

"Did you get a good look at him—could you swear to it?"

"I couldn't swear to nothing—'cepting what's in my heart. I didn't get any look at his face at all. But I'd bet eight monks and a couple o' lions that it was the Trembler. Say, listen, there ain't any doubt about it. I know I saw him."

"Well," laughed the chief, "maybe you did. I'll start the ball rolling on that idea and see what my men can pick up. But everything's against it.

"Why?"

"Because, if the dope amounts to anything, he's over in Mexico by this time, and every border town from Calexico to El Paso has its eyes open for him if he tries to get back."

"When was the last time you heard about him?"

"Oh, more than a month ago."

"Huh!" Flinty jerked his cap farther over one eye. "That guy could roll over and take a look at the Pope and be back again in that time. And I'm betting I saw him tonight. Tell you how it happened! I was going down to my car a few minutes ago and I saw his hand sticking up over a bunch of lumber. Least," Flinty laughed

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at his own nervousness, "I guess it was his hand. It acted like it. I saw it reaching up and——"

"Is that all you saw?"

"Yeh. I stopped—and then whoever it was turned and beat it. I took out after him, but I didn't have any luck."

A low laugh came from the chief.

"That couldn't have been some circus workman reaching up there for a bottle of bootleg whisky that he'd hidden in the lumber? This is a dry town, you know."

"By golly!" Flinty's ejaculation was heart-whole. "I never thought of that! That could have happened, all right. But, just the same, keep your eyes open, will you? That guy being out again don't make any hit with me!"

"Nor with me!" said the chief. "Don't worry about us—we'll be on the watch."

"Thanks. Have a good time at the show today? Thought I seen you go in."

"Fine."

"Glad you did. S'long."

And slightly reassured, Flinty McNeall stepped forth into the night again.

BUT the reassurance was not of the lasting kind. Out in the cool darkness the possibility of explanation of that hand above the lumber did not seem so plausible. In the first place, why should any workman conceal his whisky so far from his labors—where his absence would be noticed when he sought his drink? And too, the explanation of the shot during the Wild West did not seem even half as reasonable as it had in police headquarters.

In fact, the whole world seemed decidedly less roseate out here, and the whistling pucker that Flinty strove to force upon his lips would not come. Slowly he walked down the hollow-sounding causeways to the runs, his hands again deep in his pockets, his head sunk between his shoulders, his cap pulled low, his face grave. Into the zone of light he went, to hear at last a familiar voice—

"Ready t' hit th' hay, Boss?"

It was Big Whitey, his car man, dressed in his inevitable white jacket, his hat cocked at an angle, his blond, curly hair waving over his temples. Few indeed were the times when the happy, careless features of Big Whitey failed to bring a good-humored twinkle to the eyes of Flinty McNeall. This was one of them.

Sharply he surveyed the white garb of his servant, then moved close, talking from the corner of his mouth.

"My mind ain't very easy tonight, kid."

"No?" Whitey's extremely open face seemed to expand more than ever. "Ain't sick?"

"No. Just frettin' a little. Got track of a guy tonight that worries me. The Trembler. Bad guy—and he don't like me—any more'n I like him. Are the lights on in my car?"

"Not yet, but I can turn 'em on an' have 'er lit up like a cathedral by th' time——"

"Never mind. No lights on in the car at all?"

"No, sir."

"Good. Now duck out and borrow somebody's mackintosh to put over that minstrel uniform o' yours. Then take a sneak down to the car, but don't walk where outside folks can see you getting on it. Step on to the first coach you come to and go through. Get me?"

"I'm ahead o' you."

"When you get there pull down all the shades. Then go through the car with your flash-light. Don't turn on no other lights at all. If you see anything or anybody that don't look right—well, I leave the rest to you."

Whitey, big, powerful Whitey, grinned. Then he pulled the air deep into his ponderous chest and swung his heavy arms aimlessly at his sides.

"And after I've gotten this guy, what do I do?"

Flinty McNeall stared up at him with a narrow little grin on his tight-pressed lips.

"Well, you can take about five thousand beans o' my money if it's the guy I'm looking for," he answered at last. "But there ain't much chance for no such luck. I'm just coppering every bet, that's all."

"All right. Do I stick at the car?"

"Yep."

"In the dark, huh?"

"I'd rather."

Flinty looked at him queerly, almost apologetically. Big Whitey swung his giant arms again.

"Oh, all right. It suits me. Only give three taps on the door before you open it, because I'm liable t' get excited an' bite you or something, if I don't know who it is."

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Flinty McNeall smiled again, then stood watching the big form of Whitey as that person borrowed a coat and slunk down the tracks. And with the disappearance of the valet, apprehension lessened in the heart of the little showman.

He had seen Whitey work before—in blowdowns, where, a volunteer, he had hung to a plunging guy-rope until it had thrown him off, unconscious; in quarrels with recalcitrant miners in the copper section of Arizona, in flood, in wreck and in disaster. Nor had there ever been a time when Whitey did not emerge somehow victorious over his task, no matter what it had been.

And so, as the big form faded, Flinty McNeall turned to look upon the work of loading with more interest than he had felt at any time that night.

Only a few flat cars remained unfilled to complete the last train. Already the long teams of tired horses, their drivers slouching behind, their tugs dragging, were clanking toward their stalls in the box cars, leaving only the pull-up teams and the tractor, shunting and pulling the remaining wagons to their places on the train. The first section, or train, had pulled out for its journey of the night, and the second was soon to follow.

One by one the kerosene torches were extinguished, leaving at last only one, glazing at the side of the carbide tank which furnished the main illumination. A quick, rushing five minutes and the "snack stand" had been dismantled, to be pushed, blackened tent, broken pie case, counter, benches and all, under one of the wagons on a flat car.

Then up the runs went the tractor, to be blocked in place for the trip of the night. The carbide was dumped, leaving only the dingy torch, illuminating faintly the form of Tim Taylor, the trainmaster.

"All right!" he ordered with a wave of an arm. "Let's go!"

Lanterns circled, their slight light swinging like phosphorescent bugs, to be answered by more lights in the distance. A whistle, and the clanging of the engine as the great thing of steel slid along the tracks in the distance to be coupled up to the waiting train. The workmen hurried to their sleeping places of the night.

With a quick glance about him, Flinty McNeall turned and hurried down the track until he reached the first sleeping-car. Then up to the platform he went, to make his way through the various sleepers to his own domicile.

His car was dark, absolutely so, but there was no need for the mysterious signals that Big Whitey had designated. There in the doorway, a slight shadow against the more intense darkness, showed his form—waiting.

"That you, Boss?" the valet asked softly as the little circus-owner stepped into the vestibule.

"Yes. Anything doing?"

Whitey waited until they were in the dark passageway with the door closed behind them before he answered.

"Darned if I know—but I think there is. A couple o' times I thought I heard somebody sneaking around outside but I couldn't see anything. I thought once I'd take my flash-light and skirmish around. Then I thought I'd better not. Maybe I was just hearin' things, sittin' here in the dark."

"Maybe," answered Flinty as he reached the drawing-room and groped for a chair. "Maybe it's the same way with me—the dope's all against anything bein' wrong, but I just don't feel like taking chances. We got a guy shot up on the lot tonight, you know."

"No. Who?"

"Joey, the clown. And I think the guy was aiming for me, so I'm just going to play safe on him putting a bullet through the window. We'll keep the lights out until we're started."

"Well, that ain't goin' t' be long."

The air shrieked as the brakes were tested, then from far away, at the head of the train, came the "highball" of the engine, notifying the crew of the impending start. A moment more and the long train was making its grinding, hollow-sounding way over the high trestles toward the firmer ground of the mainland.

AND as long as the train pulled its slow progress through switch-yards and approaches, the private car of Flinty McNeall remained in darkness, while the little circus-owner and his faithful servant sat silent. Now and then as the train rattled over the frogs and crossings, their knees touched, or they lurched toward one another, but there were no words. Flinty was busy within his own mind—striving to trace the events of the day to

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some logical conclusion that would eliminate the Trembler.

As for Whitey—there was nothing for him to say. The beginning and the end of his interest lay in one fact—that Flinty was menaced by some one or some thing, and that was enough. What this person or thing might be made no difference. All Whitey knew or cared about was that it was a menace. So why ask questions about a settled fact?

Therefore, silent they sat until the train at last had reached the clearance of the main line and began to thunder upon the straightaway. Then, at last, Flinty, nodding slightly in the darkness, straightened in his chair and rubbed his eyes.

"Whitey!"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh. I thought maybe you was asleep."

"Nope. Want the lights turned on?"

"Guess so."

Whitey rose stumblingly, then groped his way toward the far end of the car, opposite to the one they had entered, where rested the acetylene tanks and the key that would send the gas through the tubes to the various jets of the car. Flinty McNeall, with a sudden thought, reached into a pocket and dragged forth his mouth harp. Danger was over—there could come a recurrence of the regular practises of daily life.

So, while Big Whitey fumbled toward the light-key, Flinty placed the harp to his lips and puffed his cheeks. A second more and his head was swinging from side to side, a foot was tapping and an old melody of the negro canvasmen was echoing from the harp:

> Why doan yo' be laik me?
> Why doan yo' be laik me?
> Drink yo' whisky straight
> An' let de cocaine be!

His cheeks puffed more than ever, his elbows swung fanlike, his fingers worked with the tremolo of a true mouth-organ virtuoso. Out of the verse and into the chorus:

> 'Cause Ah'm Alabama boun',
> Ah'm Alabama boun',
> If de train hain't wrecked, boys,
> Ah'm Alabama——

He ceased suddenly at a touch on his shoulder, a whispered voice in his ear:

"Nix, Boss! Cut it! Quick!"

The harp slid into a pocket. Flinty McNeall seemed to snap out of his chair.

"What's doing?"

"I don't know. That's why I came back. There's somebody out there on the platform!"

"Front or back?"

"Back. It must have been the guy who was sneakin' around the car. He must have ducked himself there when I was at the other end."

Flinty McNeall's sinewy fingers were tightening about the handle of his automatic.

"What's he doing?"

"Nothing. Just huddled out there. I was just startin' t' turn the gas-key by the side of the door when I peeked out through the glass and seen something move, I watched it a second and seen it double itself all up in a corner of the vestibule. Then I beat it back here."

Flinty McNeall's muscles stiffened. His head shifted forward. His eyes narrowed.

"Where's your flash-light?"

"Over on the table."

"Get it!"

The shadow of Big Whitey moved swiftly. A second more and he was again at his master's side, the flash-light in readiness.

"Tell me when," he whispered.

"All right. Come on. Don't spring the light till I tell you. Stay clear of my right arm so I can pump this automatic. Got me?"

"Yep."

Then they crouched and made their way along the aisle of the rocking car toward the rear platform. There, with the glass-paneled door separating them from the huddled heap on the vestibule they hesitated and slid into position for quick action. Flinty McNeall bent toward his servant.

"Get a good grip on the knob of that door and turn it easy until it unlocks. Then jerk it open and snap that flash straight in the guy's face. I'll handle him with the automatic."

Big Whitey's left hand slid forward. It grasped the oblong knob of the door and began to turn, slowly, softly. The lock hesitated, then gave, with a click so low that it was scarcely perceptible. The flash-light went forward. Big Whitey whispered:

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"All ready, Boss!"

"All right—go!"

Two figures jammed themselves in the doorway, the automatic was thrust forward and with the first gleam of light, Flinty McNeall's voice crackled above the roar of the plunging train.

"You—in the corner there—hands up!"

Then, as the flash-light caught the frightened face of a huddled person full in its gleam, the voice of the little circus-owner trailed off into blank astonishment.

"Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" he gasped, "what's the big idea?"

For the person whom the flash-light had revealed was not a man after all, but a girl, a frightened, wide-eyed, white-faced girl—the girl whom Flinty McNeall had sheltered that morning!

V

FOR a moment there was inactivity. Flinty McNeall could only stand and stare at the huddled little form of the girl in the corner, while Big Whitey, equally surprised, could only hold the flash-light upon her and grunt.

As for the girl, she remained in her crouched position, her head half turned, her big, luminous eyes blinking somewhat in the glare of the flash-light, yet holding steady. Her lips trembled slightly, but she did not speak. At last, Flinty recovered sufficiently to restore his automatic to his pocket. Then he bobbed his head.

"Come on in, kid," he ordered. "Nobody ain't going to hurt you. Whitey, gimme that flash-light and you turn on the gas and get things brightened up."

He stepped forward to assist the girl to her feet and to guide her progress into the car. Already the gas was whining in the tubes, while Whitey was hurrying from one jet to another. Flinty McNeall aided the girl into the drawing-room and seated her in a big chair. Then he looked at her quizzically.

"You need to get on the outside of a lot o' food," he said quickly, "you're all in."

She smiled slightly.

"I could eat," she answered.

Twenty minutes later, as Big Whitey was clearing away the dishes, Flinty McNeall still sat watching, his sharp little eyes centered upon her face. He had noticed a lot of things in those twenty minutes, one of which was that she had eaten ravenously, and that in spite of her apparent security, she still involuntarily clutched at her old-fashioned pocketbook; now and then she started nervously as the train slowed up on a grade, or the shriek of its whistle sounded ahead.

"I never did a thing like this before, but—" she began at last.

"That so?" Flinty grinned and rising, went close to her. Somewhat absently he fished in a pocket for a bit of gum, and nibbled at it thoughtfully. "Look here, little lady," he said at last. "Do you know you're pulling a lot of mystery stuff? If you don't mind me asking, I'd like to know what the big idea is. I'm kind of curious as to why you should be so anxious to pawn twelve thousand dollars' worth of diamonds!"

The question produced an entirely different result from the one Flinty McNeall had figured. The only look in her eyes was one of curious surprise.

"Was that what they were worth?" she asked quickly. "I thought they were worth more than he gave me—but I didn't know."

"Whose diamonds were they?"

"Whose?" There was a sudden inflection of defiance. "Why, they were mine, of course!"

"And you didn't know what they were worth?"

She hesitated then and looked at the floor. Big Whitey, lounging against the partition, grinned good humoredly. But the face of Flinty McNeall had suddenly become hard and white. The hesitancy, the boyishness of the morning was gone completely.

The incidents of the day, the mystery, the finding of this girl on the vestibule of his car, seeking to escape a city in which she had pawned thousands of dollars' worth of diamonds for a fraction of their value, suddenly had sharpened his perception, his investigative faculties. He bent slightly forward and placed a hand on the table.

"Little lady," he began, "you may say it's none of my business—and I guess it ain't. You may say that I ain't got any right butting in, and maybe you'd be right. But just the same, this here thing's gotten to the point where I'd like to get a slant at the inside and grab an office tip on what the game is.

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"Now, I might as well be frank with you. The fly cops back in Midcurrent are looking for you because a pawnbroker tipped 'em off that you pawned twelve thousand beans' worth o' sparklers for almost nothing and that you were making a grand slam out o' town when that wagon ditched you this morning.

"Then the next thing I know, here you bob up, making a sleeping-car out of my vestibule. And to be right straight and clean and above board, I'd like to grab the drift. What's your play?"

There was no answer for a moment. Flinty qualified his statement.

"Maybe you don't get what I'm driving at. I'm just trying to find out where you stand. I ain't trying to butt in on nothing that ain't none of my business—but I do think I've got a right to ask a few question and have 'em answered. Now ain't I?"

The girl raised her eyes slowly to him, then turned toward Big Whitey. Flinty interpreted her glance.

"He's safe. Now, shoot. What's the trouble?"

Again there was a long moment of hesitation. The girl fingered the old pocketbook uncertainly.

"Do you mean that you want me to tell my whole story?"

"That's exactly what I mean."

"Then I'm afraid," and a certain little expression of grimness came to her lips, "that I can't do it. Not yet. I——"

But Flinty McNeall had interrupted.

"Understand me," he said with the least degree of impatience, "I ain't doing this to be curious. I'm doing it because I've got a right to know. I told you this afternoon that I was your friend."

"Nobody realizes that better than I do."

"All right then. If I'm your friend, and if I'm going to help you, I've got a right to know what kind of ground I'm standing on. And so I'm going to play straight across the board. What's your name?"

She looked up at him with a little smile.

"I can't tell you."

Over by the partition, Big Whitey grinned and shifted his position. But there was no grin on the lips of Flinty McNeall. His head went suddenly forward. His eyes sparkled with a quick little gleam.

"Listen, little lady," he continued, "I hate to say it. But if you think you're kidding me along, you might as well shift over on some other track and fly a danger signal. Because you're not. I'm not the kind of a guy to be kidded. I just asked your name. I think maybe it'd be a wise stunt if you'd answer me."

The girl looked up sharply. For just a second, defiance showed in her eyes—then the expression changed to one that was pleading, almost piteous.

"And I told you that I couldn't say—and that was the truth! That's exactly what I intend to establish. That's the reason that I——"

Then her lips pressed tight as though to cut off the flood of speech that had threatened to burst forth. Flinty's voice came again.

"A person usually knows their name."

"True."

"You're grown up."

"Yes."

"Then, you don't mean to try to tell me'n Big Whitey here that you've lived all this here time without being called anything?"

"No, I don't. The few people that have known me have usually referred to me as 'Slovak Jack's girl.' Sometimes they called me his 'other girl.'"

"Slovak Jack, who was he? Your father?"

"That was what I always had been told. But——"

"But what?"

"Nothing."

Again Flinty McNeall's lips pressed tight with impatience. Again the girl looked at him with that pleading, piteous expression in her eyes. Flinty saw it—and turned away, to gain the courage necessary to the continuation of the cross-examination.

"You said you was called Slovak Jack's other girl. Have you got a sister?"

"So I was told."

"Don't you know?"

The girl at the table straightened. She seemed to be struggling—struggling against the impulse to tell everything, yet held by the fears which had harassed her all the day. At last she bent forward and slightly extended a hand.

"Mr. ——"

"Flinty McNeall's the way most people speak of me."

"Mr. McNeall," she began, "I know what you're thinking. I don't blame you. But—but I've got my side of things, too. A

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month ago, I would have told you everything I knew about myself, and not hesitated about a single thing. Now—" she turned away slightly—"I'm afraid."

"Why?"

"Because—I'm afraid of everybody. Because I've learned that the world isn't the same, trustworthy place that I once thought it was. I have only one possession—the thing that you're trying to learn from me. If I tell you, I will be putting everything I possess in your hands. And don't you think that I'm entitled to think a while before I do that? Don't you?" she asked impulsively.

Big Whitey shifted again at the partition.

"We ain't no crooks."

"Nix Whitey," came shortly from Flinty McNeall. "But he's right at that, little lady. We ain't got a crooked bone in our bodies—and while you're thinking things over, just remember that."

"Then you'll——"

"This here car's your home," he answered with a little gesture of salute. "Me'n Whitey'll pile out into the executive car. You'll have tonight to do your thinking. And tomorrow——"

A SUDDEN screech of grinding brakewheels, locked by the pressure of the emergencies, cut him short. The train lurched and jolted, then stopped. Big Whitey leaped to a window, peered out a second, then whirled in the direction of Flinty McNeall, steadying himself at the table.

"Somethin' gone wrong!" he exclaimed. "Looks like——"

"Where's the manager?" It was the voice of a brakeman without. "Somebody get the manager! The flat cars are afire."

One leap and Flinty gained the aisle, Big Whitey behind him, leaving the girl staring wide-eyed at the table. Out to the vestibule they shot, to glimpse the full, red glare spreading in the distance, then to lean far forth and stare up to where the flames were rising from a dozen wagons at once.

Flinty scrambled to the ground and ran forward along the uneven facings of the tracks, shouting orders as he went:

"Grab the extinguishers, everybody! Hurry!"

A dozen forms rushed away, Big Whitey among them. Forward went Flinty McNeall, to rush into the circle of the furnace-like glare, to stand dazzled for a moment by the light, his eyes blinking from the glare and smoke, his whole being strained for instant activity. Then he whirled, his arms waving. High above the crackling of the flames came the strident, commanding shout:

"Come on with those extinguishers—hear me? Hurry up with them extinguishers!"

"Cap!" It was Big Whitey, tumbling from a stock car. "They're gone!"

"The extinguishers?"

"Gone—ripped from their sockets. Every one of 'em!"

"You're crazy!" Flinty ran forward, scrambled into the stock car, forced his way past the horses and toward the extinguisher rack. "You ain't looking in the right place."

Then he stopped and stared. For where the long lines of extinguishers had been was only a line of twisted copper bands now! Every one of them was gone! Flinty blinked excitedly.

"Nobody ain't got 'em at the fire?"

"You didn't see nobody, did you?" Big Whitey asked the question hopelessly.

Flinty shook his head.

"No. But——" Then with a sudden thought: "Where's the train watchman? Maybe he got 'em out of here and went up on the other side. Maybe——"

His voice stopped short as the reflected light from without grew stronger, illuminating the wooden facing about the extinguisher rack. Hurriedly he stepped forward and peered closely at a mark on the unpainted wood.

"Blood!" he said dazedly. "Splattered blood."

"Cap!" It was Big Whitey's voice again, awed, dulled. "Cap! Look there!"

In a corner of the car, half hidden by the shadow of the feed racks, was the crumpled form of a man. Flinty hurried forward, and leaning over him, raised the arm that covered his face.

"The watchman!" he gasped. "Dead!"

A slight rattle sounded as a knife, loosened in its niche of flesh, rolled to the floor. Again Flinty McNeall felt the hands, the temples, then turned.

"No use," he remarked at last. "He's gone."

Big Whitey, trembling in his excitement,

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asked no questions, nor did Flinty McNeall conjecture. There was no need. The fact was self-evident—the Trembler had struck again!

VI

ONLY for a moment did Flinty linger at the side of the dead watchman. Then, leaving Big Whitey to care for him, he once more scurried into the open and rushed toward the salvation of the flaming flat cars.

"How about the sprinkler carts?" he asked hurriedly as he once more made his way into the circle of light.

"Nothing doing," came the voice of Bill Furniss. "Somebody opened their faucets. Not a drop of water in 'em. Only one thing to do—and I've given the order. Run to the next watering tank."

"How far?"

"Half mile. It'll fan the flames that much worse, but it's our only chance. There's the highball! Come on!"

They swung to the side of a box car, and clambered to the top, there to sprawl themselves as the train started forward, then to watch the rising flare of the flames, the scattering of the sparks and flying bits of fire as the speed increased and the wind swept hard against the burning wagons and paraphernalia.

Like some great, traveling torch, the long train slid through the night, while everywhere atop the box cars showed the silhouetted figures of workmen, their coats waving, their arms and legs flying as they sought to beat out the sparks and fire which flew about them, threatening the whole circus with destruction.

Flinty, struggling to his feet that he might stamp out a flaming bit of canvas which had fallen on the runway of the stock car, stared suddenly ahead.

"What's that car right next to the fire?" he asked shortly. Bill Furniss followed his gaze.

"Car 21. The 'bull' car."

"It's starting to burn! How far's that water-tank?"

"Half mile."

"Seems like we've got a million miles already. See anything ahead?"

"Not yet. Can't see on account of the flames. We ought to be there pretty quick."

"We better be!" Flinty said it grimly. "Either that—or not have a circus. Them flames is spreading on the bull car. They'll eat through pretty quick. And when they do that—them elephants'll stampede!"

The whiteness of Bill Furniss' face showed even in the red, flaring glare. He strained forward, to watch the constantly increasing flames as they ate their way along the top of the bull car, next to the burning flats. His hands clenched.

"Why don't we get there?" he asked excitedly. "If those elephants stampede—we're gone! Listen!"

A great, bellowing, screeching sound which rose even above the whirr of the flames and the churning of the long, flame-laden train. A high-pitched trumpeting, mixed with the screaming squeal of distress. Bill Furniss reached uncertainly for the shoulder of Flinty McNeall and gripped it.

"The fire's eating through!" he shouted. "They're squealing now—they'll be milling around in there in a minute. And when that starts, they'll turn that car over. It'll wreck the train—we won't have a chance——"

From far ahead the shrill screech of the engine whistle. A shadowy something which loomed high in the air in the changing circle of light. Then the grinding of the brakebands. They had reached the water-tank!

Long before the wheels had stopped their turning, Flinty was hanging at the end of the steel ladder, a leg swinging outward for the leap to the ground. A moment more and a half hundred circus employees had dropped to the ground also and were rushing forward.

Up on the water-tank, the forms of the train crew were struggling to lower the spout, while orders were hurtling from a dozen directions at once. Flinty McNeall shot forward.

"Hurry men!" he shouted, "we ain't got time to wait for that water! Open up that there bull car and let them elephants out!"

A rush of men, a rush of excitement. Hurrying forms which shot here and there, milled, then radiated away again. Within the great bull car, the great animals were struggling and stamping and bellowing. The flames were eating already at the eaves and sideboards.

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THE water had begun to splash from the heavy spout of the water-tank, while the engine was whistling and clanging again as it prepared to back the cars into the best possible position to extinguish the flames.

Everywhere was noise. From the long line of menagerie flats, which began again just after the break in the line caused by the bull cars, came the thundering roar of lions, the hissing and shrieking of the tigers, leopards and other cat animals, the grunting and splashing of the giant hippopotamus in its watery home, the howling and yowling and screaming of hundreds of other specimens of animal life which formed the menagerie of the Great Hippodrome.

A great cloud of steam shot high into the air as the fiercest of the fire was brought directly under the tumbling water of the tank. But at the bull car, the flames were still eating, still creeping closer and closer to the doors. Flinty McNeall leaped into action.

"Hurry with them doors there!" he shouted as a quick flash of flame shot under the eaves of the bull car. "Open that door!"

"We ain't got men enough!" a struggling workman shouted the information over his shoulder. It's jammed and we can't find th' crowbars! Get us some help here!"

"I'm here, Cap!"

It was Big Whitey, already splashing forward through a rivulet caused by the flow from the tank, to take his place with the tugging men at the elephant door. From the darkness came other forms—and others. Out came the heavy runways, to be shunted into place. Slowly the door yielded, while Flinty's arms waved fan-like. Already the car was weaving on its trucks from the stamping and struggles of the beasts within.

"All right there!" came the crackling order of the little circus-owner. "Clear out o' the way back there! Hey, you fellows at that door! When she gives way, duck under the car and out the other side. Hear me? All right—shoot!"

A great effort by the men at the door. A great lunge and then:

"Out of the way, everybody! Duck! The bulls is coming!"

A scurrying circle of workmen shot out of the circle of light and steam and smoke. Others leaped from the doors to seek refuge beneath the cars. And as they did so, there thundered down the runway, the first of the trumpeting, panic-maddened elephants, leading the others in their rush to freedom.

For a second they stared wildly, at the splashing water, the hissing, circling steam, the spitting, leaping, whirling flames. Their trunks went into the air. Their huge bodies swayed uncertainly. Then straight into the zone of darkness they thundered crashing down the fences which obstructed them, plowing through the fields and on toward the forest beyond.

From his position of safety, Flinty watched them until they had faded in the darkness. Then hurriedly he went forth to the giving of new orders.

"All right men," he shouted as he assembled the elephant tenders. "Take after 'em. They'll cool down in the woods. You'll be able to handle 'em out there."

A little group of men scurried away. Then Flinty turned to watch the efforts of the train crew as it sought to stifle the fire.

Already one end of the blazing flat cars had been soaked with water, making further progress of the fire in that direction impossible. The whistle of the engine sounded again and the train was hurriedly shunted to send the play of the water to the other end.

As for the cars in the middle, there was little hope. All that could be saved had been saved—it was merely a case of protection now. And Flinty knew that the extinguishing of the fire was only the beginning.

The sills and framework of nearly every flat car had been burned through. Not one of them would stand the jolting and crumpling process of a journey. Even with the fire extinguished, the circus would not be able to move until the arrival of a wrecking crew—or some other means of removing those cars from the track. He took a quick inventory.

"What's burned?" he asked shortly of Furniss.

"Parade stuff mostly. Tableau wagons and that sort of thing."

"Ain't none of the big top stuff hurt?"

"No."

Bill Furniss glanced along the train in the fading light. The engine now was slowly and carefully shoving the burning cars along beneath the water-tank—fearful that every movement might mean the crumpling

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of a weakened truss-rod or a burned-out sill.

"No. None of the big-top stuff hurt."

"Good enough. How're we going to get them trucks and stuff off the track?"

Bill Furniss scratched his head.

"Search me," came his slow answer. "We've got cables a-plenty up in the menagerie wagon, but we ain't got man-power enough to——"

"C'mon here, y' thick-hided sonvagun!" It was a shout from the distance. "What's th' matter o' you? Ain't you got no sense?"

Flinty McNeall turned hurriedly.

"It's Cal Morgan," he said shortly. "He's got one of the bulls. Whitey! Tear out there and give him a hand managing him." The little circus-owner looked sharply at Bill as Whitey rushed away. "That'll do the trick. Send somebody after them cables."

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Shoot. Hey, Boggs!" Flinty McNeall swirled and shouted through his cupped hands.

"Yes sir!" from the distance.

"See if you can find a bull harness!"

"Coming up, sir!"

"Good enough! Rig up a way to attach it to a cable. We've got to get these tracks cleared!"

THEN to hurrying work again, while the fire sulked sullenly under the splashing flow of the tank, sinking lower and lower in its determined fight for full possession of the train.

Accompanied by shouts and swear-words, the big elephant was shunted into position, while men rushed forward with the harness and others lugged cable from the menagerie wagons. Slowly the work progressed as the bull was harnessed and attached to its cable, then the burned vestiges of the flat cars were lassoed and dragged, some still burning, from the track.

From far away came other shouts, and other forms, as fortunate elephant men returned with their recalcitrant charges. The fire spluttered in its last fight against the flooding water of the tank, then flickered out. Men hurried forth with the acetylenes, to place them in position, and continue the straining work of clearing the track.

And in the midst of it all was Flinty McNeall, dirty, scorched, drenched, now working and struggling with the rest, now standing sharp-eyed at one side, shouting orders, watching and figuring on the future. The Great Hippodrome was to be a circus without a parade now—at least without the tableaux and other features that mean so much in the "grand-d-d-d-d, glittering-g-g-g-g-g and glorious-s-s-s-s" procession. And plans must be made to circumvent the disadvantage.

"Have to do the best we can with horses and animals," he murmured at last. "It's a cinch we ain't going to get no tableau wagons in less'n a month. Oh, but I'd like to have my hands on that guy!"

His hands clenched, and the approaching Big Whitey noticed the action.

"Same here, Cap," he grunted.

"Same what?"

"Nothin'—only I seen you actin' as if you'd like t' choke th' life out of whoever it was set her on fire."

"That's right."

Big Whitey blinked slowly.

"Think it was th' guy you was lookin' for?"

"Think?" Flinty turned abruptly. "Ain't no think to it. I know. There ain't any other guy that's mean enough to deliberately fire a thing that's got living dumb animals on it!"

Then he stopped to stare at the ruins before him—ruins that rapidly were being shunted from the right of way that the circus might proceed. Already the last of the runaway elephants had been lined up beside the tracks, while the animal men figured on ways of loading them. The wooden elephant car had burned, despite the efforts to save it.

Men and horses were straining and struggling as they strove to remove the wheels and trusses from the track. Farther along, the last of the débris was being cleared away. Everywhere was activity. Horses were being shifted to make room for the elephants, one to a car. The circus was nearly ready to resume its journey.

Whitey sidled close to his master.

"I've ordered a couple o' berths made up in the executive car for us," he announced.

Flinty turned wonderingly—then his eyes brightened with realization.

"Gosh, that's right, ain't it?" he asked. "I'd forgotten all about that girl. Didn't see her around here anywhere in the excitement, did you?"

"Nope. Guess she was too scared to come out."

They started down the track. At the

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steps of the executive car, two lengths ahead of Flinty's private car, the little circus-owner paused.

"Maybe you'd better tear down there and see if she knows about how to handle them lights," he ordered. "Maybe she might be waiting for us, too—or something."

Whitey stepped out from beside the car and stared down the line.

"Ain't much danger," he announced. "The lights is out. She's gone to sleep."

Flinty grinned in the darkness.

"She ain't going to be the only one," he yawned.

From far ahead came the whistle of the engine. The tracks had been cleared and the train was coupling. Flinty entered the executive car and piled into a berth, clothes and all.

"I'm going to keep 'em on," he announced grimly. "No telling what the enemy'll pull next."

Whereupon, he closed his eyes, not to open them again until the sharp, frightened voice of Big Whitey shouted to him in the sunlight of morning. Flinty stared upward drowsily—then started at the look on Big Whitey's face.

"What's up?" he asked.

But Big Whitey was already half down the aisle.

"Come down to your car—quick!" he called over his shoulder, and Flinty jumped from his berth.

The train had stopped on a siding. Flinty hurried to the doorway, leaped through the vestibule that Whitey had opened and followed down the track. A moment more and he gasped as he entered the drawing-room of his car.

Everywhere there were evidences of a misplaced trust. Papers were strewn about the floor where they had been pulled from the drawers of Flinty's desk. The little jewel-case in which Flinty kept his "Sunday watch," was opened and empty. The few dollars which Flinty always kept there for Big Whitey's car purchases had departed also. Slovak Jack's girl—was gone!

VII

"A LOW-DOWN, petty-larceny sneak thief!"

Big Whitey snapped out the words, then mentally kicked himself for having spoken them, as he looked into Flinty McNeall's face. As for the show-owner, a gray paleness had come into his features and he stood aimlessly patting one cupped hand into the other, his eyes slowly surveying the car, his forehead puckered and worried.

He cleared his throat—like some prisoner making his personal plea after his lawyers had failed; like some one facing the absolute, yet striving for a means of escape. He swallowed hard several times—as though it were possible to down the bitterness of it all. Then he turned half-dazedly and swung his hands before him.

"I—I don't know what to think," came at last.

The train had started to move again on its slow journey, and Flinty McNeall allowed himself to slump into a soft-cushioned berth chair. There he sat and stared as Big Whitey, again restored to his matter-of-fact personality, began to pick up the strewn papers and to restore the room to order.

Flinty somewhat absently took a match from a pocket and broke it. His lips puckered, as though to whistle—then settled straight and grim again. At last he moved uneasily and glared at the slow-passing telephone posts without. Then he turned again to Big Whitey.

"I wouldn't ha' taken her for that kind, would you?" he asked plaintively.

"Who? Me?" Big Whitey turned from his labors. "Gosh, you never could prove nothin' about women by me."

"I guess that goes all the way around." Flinty McNeall wiggled a foot and stared solemnly at it. "Woman, as she flies, is a queer, queer bird!"

Then suddenly his whole attitude shifted. He bent forward. His expression changed.

"Whitey!"

"Yes sir."

"What've you done about Bosworth?"

"Bosworth? The watchman?"

"Yeh."

"Guess I've done everything I can do—wired ahead for an undertaker. You ain't going to try to fill your date at Milburn today are you?"

"No. We'll make it a feed stop, open up the cages and let the natives look at the animals for nothing—to kind o' make up for not giving a show there. Why?"

"Well, that's what I figured. I knew we'd have some time there, so I wired ahead

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to this guy to meet us and everythin' like that."

"Good boy." Flinty McNeall said it half under his breath. "Have you looked him up on the identification cards?"

"Bosworth? Yes, sir. Shipped out of Salt Lake with us. Wrote on his identification card that he didn't have no near relatives, and not to need notifying anybody if anything happened to him. Nothin' but a drifter, I guess."

"A drifter." Flinty McNeall said the words softly. "And he's drifted away—on his last tide."

Again a long silence, except for the creaky rumbling of the train. Then—

"Whitey!"

"Right here, sir."

Flinty reached for one of his inevitable matches.

"We ain't any of us got too many friends, Whitey! Specially when we've placed our chips in the last show-down. I don't guess none of the bunch around the show knew this guy, did they?"

"No, sir."

"Then I don't guess they'd be interested in trailing him to the lot. But somebody's got to kind of hand him a little good-by. Let me know when you're ready. You'n me'll go out to the lot."

Big Whitey pulled slightly at his cap.

"Yes, sir," he answered quietly and left the car.

As for Flinty McNeall, he still remained in his soft-cushioned chair, his head sunk between his shoulders his thin, sinewy hands folded, his eyes narrowed—almost unseeing. Outside, the landscape was swirling past as the circus train, clear on the right of way, swept along on good roadbed and firm ballast.

The sunlight, creeping across the car, caught first the toe of Flinty's shoe, then his knee, then his shoulder, and finally his face—but Flinty hardly moved. For Flinty had taken up the problems that had come upon him, the problems that one day and one night had brought him, the problems of mystery, of malice, of distrust and of hate.

That it all had been due primarily to the Trembler and the vitriol that had simmered in his soul for the last twenty years, Flinty did not doubt.

But the ramifications, the various angles of the activities that had come into being since the morning before—the finding of the girl, the mystery of her, the chase by the detective, the shadow on the causeway, the fire, the evidences of incendiarism, the death of Bosworth, the disappearance of the one being in the world who had been able to touch all of Flinty McNeall's heart-strings at once—so much had come upon him in so short a space of time that his brain failed to master the reasons for it all.

Question after question rose in his mind—hopes that she, after all, might be innocent of the stigma her disappearance had caused her, hopes that the happenings of the day that had gone might have been accidents after all, a strange chain of coincidence that had interwoven the events of years into the space of hours.

And hours Flinty gave to the consideration of it all—only at last to move wearily, to reach for a cigaret, and to half-whisper:

"The Trembler—all the way through! And she was helping him."

A FORM moved forward from the rear of the car where it had remained motionless ever since its entrance a half hour before. It edged closer, then veered around to look into Flinty McNeall's face. Then came an apologetic cough, a shuffling of feet, an aimless waving of hands as the eyes of Big Whitey stared into the lined, suddenly old features of the little master he loved, and the faltering question—

"Y'—y' wouldn't like your mouth organ?"

But Flinty McNeall only shook his head and Big Whitey sought a dust-rag that he might turn to the shining of an over-polished woodwork.

"Everything's fixed, Cap," he said over his shoulder at last.

Flinty McNeall's eyes bored straight ahead.

"All right."

From far ahead came the sound of the engine-whistle. Big Whitey ducked to a window.

"Milburn," he announced.

Flinty McNeall shifted as though to rise, then settled back into his chair again.

"All right, kid. Call me when the feed's over."

It was late in the afternoon—for the feeding of a circus train is no short task—

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when Big Whitey again stood by the side of his master.

"All ready, Cap."

Flinty McNeall rose. He walked to the vestibule of his car where "Dutch" Stump, the boss hostler, awaited him with his riding-horse. Far across the vacant lots, a black wagon made its appearance as it turned into the thoroughfare and waited. Flinty McNeall turned toward Stump.

"How about Whitey?"

"Him and me's goin' in the buckboard," answered the boss hostler. "I thought I might as well take a turn out to the cemetery as not. Noth—nothin' else much to do," was added slowly.

A wisp of a smile came to the lips of Flinty McNeall of the Great Amalgamated.

"Dutch," he said quietly, "I've just realized why it is I've got the best-looking horses in the show business. A guy's heart's got a lot to do with it."

"Thanks, Boss," answered Dutch Stump. "C'mon, Whitey,"

And out to the cemetery they went, the three of them jogging behind the slow-moving hearse, to gather at last about the bit of vacancy that soon was to be a heaped mound of clods.

One by one they said good-by to the being they hardly had known in life, then silently they turned back to the gaudy-colored cars of the circus, to the rush and jangle of the "road," leaving behind the one who had fought and died in his efforts to save the Great Hippodrome. And oh, how Flinty McNeall would liked to have known just how he died and who killed him!

The thought brought action out of the retrospect. Hurriedly Flinty skirted his train, seeking out his bosses and his superintendents as the work of loading progressed. One by one he personally inspected the flat cars, the torches, the new extinguishers which had taken the place of the ones that had disappeared—then went to his waiting officers of the train.

"How many watchmen for to-night?" he asked sharply.

"Four."

"Not enough. Put twice that many on the flats alone. Have a man in every stock car. Nobody sleeps under wagons or anywhere except in their own berths tonight. If you catch anybody—put the cuffs on him. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"How about the sprinklers?"

"All filled, sir."

"Have 'em examined by the watchmen every half hour. If they find anything wrong, let 'em flag down the train and fill up at the first water-tank."

The superintendent and bosses scurried to the carrying out of orders, while Flinty, the faithful Whitey trailing behind him, turned down the track to the private car.

A half hour later the conductor signaled "high-ball" and the circus train once more was on its way, while Flinty, in his car, paced the narrow enclosure, his hands clasped tight behind his back, his eyes gleaming with the thousand thoughts that were in his brain. At last he turned to regard the staring Whitey.

"Kid," he asked, "what's your verdict?"

"Verdict? About what?"

"About that girl who was in here last night."

"Well," and Whitey drawled out the answer against his will, "I guess I said a mouthful this mornin'. T' me, she ain't nothin' but a little petty-larceny——"

THE train jolted slightly. Flinty McNeall's hands came from behind his back into a clutching, strained posture before him. His head shot forward, the cords of his neck stood forth.

"What was that?"

Whitey turned his head nonchalantly.

"Only the engineer bucklin' up to take a run for a hill. Why?"

"Nothing."

Flinty had turned to his pacing again. But Whitey knew better. The shadows were beginning to fall—and with the shadows, Big Whitey knew that Flinty McNeall was living again the events of the night before. Slowly he rose and quite nonchalantly—to all appearances at least—illuminated the car. But Flinty did not cease his pacing.

For another long night had begun for the little circus-owner—a night in which every strange noise set his nerves ajangle, when every stop of the train as it ground on toward its next show-place, caused the little being of the checkered cap to hurry to the vestibule that he might lean forth and, staring ahead, assure himself of the safety of the hundreds of human beings and animals under his care, a night in which Big

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Whitey dozed in his chair—but in which Flinty did not cease his vigilance for a second.

Once, with a little glance to assure himself that Whitey's snores were real, he slid through the cars and out to the flats, where, led from one to another by the watchmen, he again personally inspected every wagon, every shadow, every possibility of danger. Hour by hour—always above him Flinty McNeall seemed to feel the presence of the shuddering, palsied hand of the Trembler, clutching, hounding—ready to strike. But the blow did not come.

Nor did it come the next day, nor the next—feverish days in which Flinty struggled with the problem of a "short" parade and limited car space. Nor did it come in the week that dragged its slow way along, nor in the fortnight that lengthened to nearly a month. But the influence still was there.

Big Whitey saw it. Big Whitey could not fail to see it—the lines had deepened under the eyes of Flinty McNeall, his hand was less steady. And Whitey in his rough, groping way, sought to remedy it all—only to fail. But he persisted.

"If I were you—" it was the hundredth time he had said it—"I wouldn't let this here thing get me. I——"

"Get me?" Flinty McNeall's face bore a little of the old grin as he looked up at Whitey. Then he sobered. "Y' don't think it's myself that I'm caring about, do you? I'm wondering what'd happen if the tent should just 'happen' to burn up some afternoon, or the train should smash into an open switch some night by accident. I'm thinking——"

"Well, get it off your mind. And besides, I know something else that's bothering you. You keep putting seven and eight together and wondering what this here girl had to do with the Trembler and if she was just a stall and——"

"Whitey—" Flinty McNeall's voice was slow, and somewhat cold—"I'm afraid you've got more sense'n y' think you have. You've hit it."

Big Whitey grinned.

"I never used t' miss a stake when I was slingin' sledge," he answered. "But a blind guy with one eye shut could see that you'd fallen for that dame."

Involuntarily Flinty raised a hand.

"Don't call her a dame," he asked slowly.

Big Whitey rubbed a massive hand against his chin.

"Oh, all right. But that's what she was, just the same. Anyway, you've got t' admit she was a strange one."

A bit of a smile lifted the corners of Flinty's lips.

"Yep," he answered, "she came into our lives mighty strange, Whitey. And went out stranger. But somehow or other——"

He started at a knock at the door, then slid back into his chair as Dutch Stump entered to complain of the crowding of the horse cars. Dolefully Stump waved the newspaper he carried as he told his story, finally to lay it on the table before Flinty. Dolefully he continued his recital of his woes as boss hostler—suddenly to become aware that the little person who had always heard his pleas so attentively was not listening to a word. Instead, Flinty McNeall was reading, avidly, hungrily. Suddenly he raised his head and Big Whitey caught a feverish, excited gleam in his eyes.

"Stump," he ordered, "go out to the lot and corral Dickson and the superintendents. Tell 'em I want 'em down here at the car for a few minutes—for instructions."

"Yes, sir."

"Whitey!"

"On the job, sir."

"Pack up my grip. Put a bunch o' stuff in it, lots o' shirts and collars and all that sort o' thing. Better get out that little steamer trunk too and slam my best duds in it. And——"

"Y'—y're not goin' away?"

"Right!"

"But——"

"But what?"

"How about all this here trouble an' everything, about this Trembler guy an' this girl an'——"

"That's just what I'm going to find out about." Flinty again stared at the paper. "Exactly. And I think I'll know a lot more about it when I get through than I do now. While you're at it, dig into the drawer of my desk and find out how much O.W. RR. & N., O.SL. and U.P. mileage I've got. I'm going to Kansas City!"

"Kansas City?" Whitey gasped. "But 'spose the Trembler should pull somethin' while you're gone——"

"We've got to take our chances," said Flinty McNeall grimly. "I'm hoping that he'll try to get me—instead of my circus.

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And anyway—I've just drawn my first good card in this little game and I've got to play it! So hurry up with that packing!"

VIII

WHAT the newspaper contained Flinty McNeall did not reveal. With a single motion he ripped the item from the page and jammed it into a pocket. Then feverishly he paced the floor of his stateroom, while in the bedroom, Big Whitey rushed to the work of packing up and the assembling of mileage. Once the servant came to the doorway and grinned apologetically.

"I'm goin' too, ain't I?" he asked slowly.

"Nope." Flinty shook his head. "Nope—I can get along all right."

"There's plenty o' mileage." Big Whitey's face was mournful. "It wouldn't cost much just for me t' tag along. I might——"

Flinty weakened—then strengthened again.

"Nope," he answered again. "I don't know what I may bump into, Whitey. It may be dangerous. I guess I'd better play it alone."

"All right, sir." Then, as an afterthought. "Well, if anything should come up so's I'd want to telegraph you or anything, where'll you be?"

"Muehlbach Hotel," answered the little circus-owner absently, then hurried forward to admit the bosses who were stamping in the vestibule. A moment later and orders were snapping from the lips of Flinty McNeall as he again strode the stateroom, his hands behind his back, his head deep between his shoulders, his eyes on the carpet.

"You guys know the burning of this circus the other night wasn't any fluke," he announced jerkily. "All right. The guy that pulled off the stunt was after me—to cause me trouble. Maybe he'll keep after my circus when I'm gone. I'm betting he won't—I'm betting he'll trail me personally. But I ain't going to take chances. That's why I've sent for you.

"I've got to go away. Something's bobbed up in Kansas City and I've got to get out there. It's up to you guys to protect this circus. Keep a double guard on everything. Understand? I don't want no fires burning up a lot of spectators some afternoon, and I don't want no wrecks. So keep your eyes open.

"And if things start going wrong—cancel! Understand? Cancel every date, throw the show on the train and run her into the barn for the season. So—" there was more snap to his voice than ever—"if you want to keep running the rest of the Summer, prop your eyes open and keep this here circus protected. Got me?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. What time is it?"

Dutch Stump looked at his watch.

"Five-thirty."

"All right. Get back on the job. Whitey!"

The valet turned from the writing-desk.

"Right here, sir."

"Got everything packed up?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Go out and grab the gillie wagon and take my stuff to the station. I'm going to try to catch the 6:10 limited."

Whitey tugged at his hat, slouched across one eye.

"Easier'n shootin' fish, sir."

FOUR days later, Flinty McNeall, millionaire owner of the Great Hippodrome Shows, stood at the side of a taxi-cab staring up toward a great house in the Rockhill district of Kansas City. Long he eyed the mansion, then reached for a newspaper clipping in his pocket. Studiously he read the lines of it, then turned to the taxi driver.

"Happen to know who lives here?" he asked.

"Who? Me? Sure. James Darling, the millionaire."

Flinty grinned slightly.

"That's who I want," came his announcement as he folded the newspaper clipping and returned it to his pocket. "Wait for me."

He ascended the long steps, then waited somewhat timorously for the answer to the ring at the bell. His heart was thumping slightly. His throat was a bit dry. Flinty McNeal, millionaire though he was himself, was not in the habit of calling at the homes of other millionaires. Nor was he accustomed to the procedure in the homes of the exclusively wealthy.

Flinty McNeall's money was circus

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money, gained over the worn, marble coin-counter of a ticket wagon, in dimes and dollars. Common money from the common people to a man who believed himself no better for his money than the hostler who groomed his riding horse. And to call at the home of a man described as "the wealthiest man in Kansas City" pulled hard at Flinty's knowledge of the ways of society.

Long he waited. Then at last the big door opened to display a white-haired, wrinkled old man who blinked at the flood of light from without. Flinty cleared his throat.

"Howdy," he announced. "Mr. Darling?"

"Me, sir?" The old man smiled apologetically. "Oh, no, sir. You've made a mistake, sir. I'm only——"

"Well," Flinty had gained more confidence now, "it don't make much difference. Flinty McNeall's my name. I wanted to know if I could see Miss Mary Darling. There's a Miss Mary Darling here, ain't there?"

"Yes, sir. You say the name is McNeall, sir?"

"Yeh. Flinty McNeall of the Great Hippodrome Shows."

The old butler stared, then opened the door wider.

"Perhaps you'd better come in, sir."

The soft spring of the deep carpets seemed to ease Flinty's perturbed nature a bit as he entered, yet not sufficiently for him to accept the great, softly upholstered chair that the old butler pointed out to him. Flinty wondered how he would rise again, once he had descended into it.

"I'll—I'll just mope around," he announced.

"Very good, sir."

The soft shuffle of the butler's footsteps faded away as he disappeared up the great stairway. Flinty McNeall was alone.

And now that he was here, now that he had ended a journey half across the country, what would he say to her? What could he say to her? Demanding an explanation from a poor, frightened, worried, half-starved girl was a great deal different from demanding one from a person who undoubtedly was the mistress of the biggest home in a city of more than a quarter of a million persons. Flinty twirled his cap in his hand. Then somewhat aimlessly, he reached for the clipping and read it for the hundredth time:

DAUGHTER RESTORED TO JAMES DARLING

Kansas City Multimillionaire Regains Daughter Lost for Twenty Years

Kansas City, Missouri. By mail— These are the happiest days in the life of James R. Darling, multimillionaire banker and capitalist of Kansas City. For in his beautiful home at 4040 Marston Street is the girl whom he had mourned as dead for twenty years—alive and happy and well, his daughter Mary, restored to brighten the fading years of his life.

When an infant, Miss Darling was taken by her mother on an ocean trip from San Francisco to Portland, Oregon. Just off the entrance of Coos Bay the ship was wrecked, all the passengers being forced to take to the boats and life rafts. That was the last that James Darling ever knew of his wife or his baby. And now, after twenty years, comes the sequel to the story.

Mrs. Darling died of exposure, but before the end entrusted the child to a steerage passenger of the ship, the only one remaining alive of the seven or eight passengers who had set out from the ship. At the same time she gave him a small box containing her jewels, and other valuables and keepsakes that would identify the child. Whatever became of this man has never been learned. All that is known is that he left the child in the care of an illiterate lumberman named Slovak Jack, in the vicinity of Midcurrent, Oregon, and disappeared.

Miss Darling, in company with Slovak Jack's motherless child who was about the same age, grew up to womanhood without any knowledge of her identity, the box containing the true story of her parentage remaining unopened through the years, where Slovak Jack in his slow, plodding way, had placed it—and forgotten it.

However, chance played its cards. One day a short time ago Miss Darling, who had been educated in the lumber-camp schools, happened across the box, opened it—and discovered her identity. It was then a comparatively easy matter for her to assemble her proofs and to hurry to her rightful father in Kansas City.

Slowly Flinty McNeall again folded the paper and stuffed it into a pocket. He brought forth a match, started to break it, looked suddenly at the velvet floor covering and desisted. Then he whirled, his heart doubling in the intensity of its beating, his throat dry and hot and parched. There had come the sound of steps on the stairs, the tiny swish of a skirt.

Flinty drew his breath deeply into his lungs. Through his head a sentence was running, repeating and re-repeating:

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"Don't let her get your goat, kid—remember, don't let her get your goat! Make her tell the truth—even if she is a millionaire's daughter. Make her——"

But the steps were very near now! Flinty braced himself as the heavy portières parted slightly. He started forward—then stopped stock still, his eyes wide and staring, his breath ending suddenly in a strange, droning gasp. A woman stood before him, smiling, bowing slightly and repeating his name. But the woman—was a woman he never had seen before!

With a slight acknowledgment of his unconcealed amazement she came forward and extended a hand.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. McNeall," she announced. "Won't you be seated?"

Flinty grinned with a sudden return of equanimity.

"Oh, I get it now," he said somewhat awkwardly. "I sure was fussed for a minute. You're a friend of Miss Darling's?"

"No." The young woman smiled again. "I am Miss Darling."

"Huh?" Flinty stiffened just as he started to bend himself into a chair. "Gosh, then I've been wrong from the start-off."

"Won't you sit down?" She beckoned again toward the chair.

Flinty stared out toward where the curtains moved slightly as the old butler stuck his head within, seemingly assured himself that all was well, then faded away again. The little circus-owner twirled his cap, gulped, then sank into the chair.

"Blessed if you ain't got me!" he announced at last. "I—" he raised a hand and assured himself that his brow really was covered with perspiration—"I came here expecting to find somebody entirely different. I guess I'd just better beg pardon all the way around and go on back to my circus."

"But you came to see Miss Darling—and I'm Miss Darling."

Flinty pulled at his cap.

"I guess I was wrong," he said at last. "I ought've known I was wrong from the start. But, I—I thought— Well, here's the whole yarn:

"I'm a circus-owner. Run the Great Hippodrome Shows. Made a good deal of money and all that sort of thing—or I guess I wouldn't have run away on a fool goose-chase like this. Nearly a month ago my show was up in Midcurrent, Oregon, when a wagon of mine ran away and knocked a little girl cuckoo. Pretty little thing she was," he added reminiscently, "not a bit like you—er—that is, what I mean is that she was a different type, don't you know—er——"

"I understand."

Miss Mary Darling smiled and passed over the *faux pas*—although Flinty would never have known it by that name. The little circus-owner continued:

"Well, anyway, she was sure a pretty little thing, kind o' small, with hair that had gold running all the way through it and eyes that could make the heart of a brass monkey turn handsprings and—well, never mind the details. The point of the whole thing is that she seemed to be up against it or something and—well, I helped her out."

"And what then?" The young woman seemed intensely interested.

Flinty resumed the twirling of his cap.

"Well, she seemed to want to get out of town and so I helped her along. Then we had a little acci ent on the train and while I was looking after it—" Flinty's voice grew suddenly hard and cold—"while I was out something happened in my car that I'd like to know about. Anyway, I got back there to find that the girl had beaten it and that some of my things had happened to vamoose along about the same moment."

"And she said her name was Mary Darling?"

"No, she didn't say it. She just acted like it. I seen a card she had, too, with the name of James Darling on it. So, when that stuff came out in the papers, I naturally put two and two together. And I was just mad enough to leave my circus and jump out here to find out why the daughter of a millionaire should be playing around at this sneak-thief stuff. It wasn't——"

But the smile on the face of the young woman opposite interrupted: She was looking intently at Flinty, a queer, boring, interrogative expression in her eyes. At last she rose and walked to a large library table, where she opened a drawer. Then she turned.

"Was there anything of intrinsic value taken from your stateroom?" she asked quietly.

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"Yes."

"Was it very valuable?"

Flinty McNeall spread his hands.

"Oh, never mind about that, Miss Darling," he answered quickly. "It ain't that I'm thinking about. It's just the thought of having been kidded along and that sort of thing, don't you know. Besides, there's another little angle of it that you ain't in on and that I ain't caring much about telling. But it's all kind of got me—and without meaning any offense or anything of that kind, I'm awful sorry to find that you ain't the person I thought you were going to be. It'd given me a chance to settle up a lot of things that are on my mind and——"

"Maybe I can help you. But to return to the valuables: could you give a description of anything that was taken from your car?"

"Me? Why, sure! The important thing was a watch—my Sunday watch I always called it because it was kind of delicate—one of these twenty-one-jewel affairs that a fellow can't wear every day when he's hanging around with a thing like a circus; so I just used to put it on when I got dolled up. I——"

"Gold, I suppose?"

"Yeh. Thin model, twenty-year case."

Then Flinty gasped again. For Miss Darling, the woman he never had seen before, had turned from the table, and was holding forth a yellow, round object in her hand.

"Is this anything like it?" she asked, glancing from the watch toward Flinty. Flinty's eyes, wide already, grew wider still.

"Gosh!" Flinty McNeall dropped back in his chair. "My watch!"

IX

SOMEWHAT dazedly Flinty McNeall reached for his watch and opened the case. His name engraved within removed the last possible doubt and he stood staring at the new Mary Darling, now bringing forth several legal-appearing documents from the desk.

"Well, you've got me!" Flinty burst forth at last. "You ain't the woman who said she was Mary Darling, yet you hand me the watch that was cribbed out of my car by another person. I—I've got to confess, I——"

He ceased as Miss Darling turned to him.

"I wonder if you care to look at these affidavits," she proffered.

"Affidavits? About what?"

"The proofs of my birth—here's one with Slovak Jack's mark on it, and another signed by an attorney of Midcurrent that shows exactly who I am and that I'm entitled——"

Flinty grinned apologetically.

"If it ain't hurting your feelin's," he announced finally, "I ain't caring much right now who you are. What I want to know is who the girl was that copped my watch and what game she was playing and where I can lay my hands on her and——"

Mary Darling smiled quizzically.

"I'll try to answer your questions one at a time," she answered with a quick look toward a little movement of the heavy portières. "In the first place she was an impostor, the real daughter of Slovak Jack. After we had opened the box containing the jewels—well, I suppose it went to her head. She stole them and was attempting to get away from town when Muldoon, the policeman, heard of her.

"After he was unable to find her, we sent out a broadcast alarm. The result was that she was arrested in Channelville the next day. We got your watch then, together with my valuables. Channelville is about two miles from the place your circus burned, I believe. At least, that's what she said when we questioned her."

Flinty McNeall lowered his head.

"I don't like to hear that—about her," he said finally.

"No more did I like to learn it. We had lived as sisters a good many years, you know."

"Yeh."

There was a long silence, and then—

"Is she—is she still in jail out there in Channelville?"

The woman shook her head with a little smile.

"Hardly. She escaped the same night. The bars of the jail were sawed—from the outside."

"From the outside?" A quick, sharp note came into Flinty McNeall's voice. "Who did it?"

"We were unable to learn. The only person we could get any trace of was a man I had seen her meet on the road near our house one day. She ran as soon as she saw

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me coming. When she escaped from jail, naturally a search was made of the town for knowledge of any strange character. Only one unknown person had been in town that day."

"Yes."

"And he," said Miss Darling slowly, "must have been the one who aided her escape, a tall, muscular man with a——"

"With a scar?"

"Yes, running diagonally across his face. The day I saw him, he was angry and the scar was nearly purple."

"Do you know anything about his hand?" Flinty had come close now and his interrogations almost clicked against his teeth. "Know anything about that—huh?"

"Not personally. The people who saw him in Channelville said that he seemed to have something wrong with one hand—it jerked upward every now and then and seemed——"

"That's enough." Flinty's face had become hard and old again. "I know him! The Trembler!" Then he turned hesitantly and held forth a hand. "I—I guess there isn't much more for me today, except to thank you for holdin' my watch for me. I'm sure sorry to find that out—about her."

"We were just as sorry as you, Mr. McNeall. She was Slovak Jack's daughter, you know, his flesh and blood. Now she is a fugitive from justice, with every police department looking for her. We sent out information cards again as soon as she escaped from Channelville. If you'll go to headquarters here, you'll probably find one signed by the constable of Channelville."

Flinty pulled his breath deep into his lungs.

"Guess I might as well take a run down there. Billy Griffin—I guess he's still chief—an' me used to be pretty good buddies around Kansas City about fifteen years ago. Yeh—I guess I will take a chase down there. There ain't much else for me to do," he added with a touch of melancholy. "I'm going to hit the road back to the circus in the morning.

"I'll be kind o' glad in a way. I'm staying down here at the Muehlbach and it's pretty high-toned for just a common ordinary circus gink. It'll be pretty good to feel the trucks of a railroad car rattling under me again. Well—" and he pulled the breath into his lungs again with a quick little gasping motion—"I don't guess there's much else for us to stand here slinging the chatter about. I'm glad t've met you, Miss Darling—even if it did bring me a disappointment. S'long. Lot's o' luck."

Then he left the big house to give an order to the taxi driver and to huddle himself in a corner of the big seat as the machine turned toward town. Block after block he remained there, motionless, his eyes blinking slightly, his hands clenched. Now and then his lips moved slightly, as though sentences, invective, sharp sentences, were running through his brain. At last he stirred, coughed slightly as the taxi stopped, and looked out to note the brown arched doorway of police headquarters.

FIVE minutes later, a bit of a smile had returned to his drawn features. He was seated across the table from Chief Griffin, puffing at a cigar and talking of the days when Griffin was Sergeant Billy and Flinty McNeall was the contracting agent of his own show—making the fight to reach the top and saving money at every angle.

"But just the same," Flinty was saying reminiscently, "I managed to have my fun, Billy. What was the name of that island about three miles up the river where they used to pull off the prize-fights?" Flinty scratched his head. "Thought I'd never forget that. Got its name from some kind of a bramble that only grew around up there."

"Good thing it did, too," the chief countered. "It was worse than any cockleburs I ever struck. Fantom bramble they called it."

"That's it. Fantom bramble. Called the island Ghost Island. I remember it all now."

"So do I. Two or three of the men from here went up with the Federal officials at the last raid they pulled off. When they came back they looked like they'd been in a bur-throwing contest instead of a prize-fight raid. Let's see, that must have been all of twelve years ago."

Flinty chuckled.

"Fourteen, Billy," he answered. "Fourteen exactly. Because I was at the other end of the raid and got covered myself making my getaway. What's ever happened to the island since then? Don't

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guess they ever do any fighting there now."

"No—it's been deserted ever since. I guess it's all fantom bramble now—to say nothing of the reeds and marshes. The river's taken a turn up that way now and there's a pretty swift current right around there—to say nothing of the floods from the backwater every Spring. Three or four bad eddies there, too, and a couple of people have been drowned coming down the river. That hasn't helped it. Nobody ever goes near it any more—it's as ghostlike as its name and getting worse all the time——"

There had come a knock on the door, an answering call from the chief and a sergeant entered.

"Here's that card you wanted, sir," he announced.

"Give it to Mr. McNeall."

Somewhat unsteadily Flinty McNeall took the card. Slowly he read it, while the sergeant awaited its return.

"I guess that's all there is to know," came slowly. "I guess I sure made a slip on judgment there. I'd have almost bet that little girl was straight."

Chief Griffin smiled.

"I've had some bumps that way myself, Flinty. You never can tell from their looks, can you?"

Flinty McNeall half wheeled in his chair and stared through the big windows at the milling activities of the street without, where the lower artery of a big city, with its employment agencies, its rescue missions, its saloons and barrel houses and cheap restaurants, wound its somewhat crooked way toward the Missouri River, five blocks beyond.

He seemed not to have heard the chief's question. Slowly he turned the card in his hands again, and once more scanned its lines of description and offers of reward for the arrest and return of the girl he had met on the circus lot at Midcurrent. Then just as slowly returned the bit of cardboard to the patient sergeant. That person hesitated.

"Begging your pardon, Chief," he said, "but Mort Scott's outside and——"

"Who?" Flinty suddenly straightened in his chair.

"Mort Scott—you know him." Chief Griffin waved a hand. "Been running a storeshow around Kansas City for twenty years."

"Know him?" Flinty grinned again, happily. "I should snicker I do. What's Mort been doing—running without a license?"

"No—lost his gorilla, Casey."

"Chimp, you mean—chimpanzee. There ain't no gorilla in captivity."

"Well," and Chief Griffin laughed, "you and Mort'll have to fight that out. Send him in, Kennedy."

A moment later, Mort Scott, "storeshowman," and Flinty McNeall, owner and manager of the Great Hippodrome Shows, were quarreling good-naturedly over a corner of Chief Griffin's table.

"Now listen," Flinty McNeall waved his cigar and hunched himself forward in his chair, "you know you ain't got any gorilla, Mort."

"I know I ain't now," Scott answered with a little laugh. "But I did have one."

"You had an overgrown black-faced chimpanzee!" retorted Flinty. "Where'd you get that stuff, anyhow. I——"

"Sh-h-h-h-h-h-h!" Mort Scott leaned forward in mock dismay. "Don't say it so loud. The newspapers'll get hold of it. You're right, though. He was a chimp. But oh, such a chimp, Flinty! If he weighed an ounce, he weighed close to three hundred pounds. Lift a ton as easy as you'n me could lift a match. So I put it over that he was a gorilla, and ever since he escaped the papers have been running these 'Murder in the Rue Morgue' stories, and half the town's afraid to go to bed at night for fear Casey'll come along and bite off their ear or something. Ain't you seen the papers?"

"Ain't had time. Getting a lot of publicity?"

"Publicity?" The chief turned from his desk. "They've been working this poor police department to death trying to find the blamed animal. Mort's right. The town's scared. We get on an average of a hundred calls a night from people who think they've seen the darned thing running around their houses. And the worst of it is that we've got to investigate every one of them. If I didn't know Mort for an honest man, I'd say he'd hidden the brute away somewhere to stir up excitement——"

"On the square, Chief, I haven't!" Mort Scott was almost mournful in his sincerity. "If I had, I'd ha' brought him back a long time before this—and been coining money

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hand over fist. That's what's breaking my heart! I wondered whether you'd heard anything or——"

"Not a line."

Mort Scott scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Chief—I've been wondering somethin'. You don't suppose nobody could have stole him, do you?"

"Stolen him? Three hundred pounds of him? Hardly. Who could handle him, for one thing?"

"Well, nobody much," Mort Scott admitted, "lessen it could've been a woman. That darned chimp was just like putty with a woman. Seemed he knew they were frail or somethin', and he'd stand for anything from 'em. But a man—well, a man was different. He sure was a smart monk—he sure was."

Flinty McNeall chuckled.

"And that's all that's on your mind?" he laughed. "You ought to have half your circus burn up like mine did about a month ago. Come on, let's tear out to the Model and I'll throw one of those old-time chicken dinners into you. Maybe you'll feel better. Join us, Chief?"

"No, thanks."

THREE hours later Flinty McNeall parted from his showman friend of other days and turned into his hotel. The thoughts of his misplaced judgment had come back to him, and his narrow little shoulders were bent again as he approached the long desk for his key. Somewhat dolefully he waited, then looked up quickly at the sound of a chuckle from above.

"I'm a sonvagun!" he gasped. "Where'd you come from?"

"Th' circus," answered the wide-eyed Whitey in quick apology. "Y'see, I just had t' do it, Cap. I knowed I ought t' do it, and seein' there was plenty o' mileage, I just went ahead an' came. I knew you'd be up against it if I didn't, needin' it maybe an'——"

"Needin' what?" Flinty McNeall's eyes were growing wider with every second.

Big Whitey forced a solemn, businesslike expression, then slowly drew from a pocket a shining, metal contraption.

"It's your mouth-harp!"

"Mouth-harp?" Flinty smiled in spite of himself. "'Course, I couldn't have gone to the ten-cent store and got one if I needed it, could I?" Then he chuckled. "Might-'ve known you'd have come trailing along. Well, all right. Wait 'till I get my key and we'll——"

"I've got the key already, sir."

"You?"

"Yeh. There was an old gink mopin' around here waitin' for you an' so I just thought I'd corral him in your room so you'd be sure not to lose him. He looked kind o' mysterious t' me."

"Old guy?" Flinty McNeall scowled in amazement. "I don't know no old guy. Let's grab the elevator, quick!"

Three minutes later, Flinty McNeall opened the door of his room, to stop and look uncertainly toward the white-haired, bent old figure who had arisen at the sound of the key in the lock. It was the aged butler—from the home of James Darling.

X

"WELL?" Flinty advanced and looked into the worried features of the old man. "What's the row?"

"Row, sir? I hope you'll pardon me, sir, but you see, I've been in the Darling family a good many years."

"Yeh?"

"Yes, sir. Man and boy, I practically grew up with Mr. Darling. I knew his wife before he married her, sir—when she was just a young slip of a girl. There was a great deal of difference in their ages."

"Yeh, I guess so." Flinty McNeall was examining his mouth-harp, meanwhile glancing quizzically toward the aged butler. Big Whitey was standing, looking from one to the other, plainly curious. "But what's that got to do with me?"

"Maybe nothing, sir, but I hope you'll pardon me for coming down here. I——"

"Oh, that's all right. Just count yourself pardoned all the way 'round. I just don't seem to hog-tie the drift of things—that's all. How'd you find out where I was stayin'?"

"I was listening behind the portières, sir."

"Huh?" Flinty straightened. "Listenin'? Why?"

"I can't tell you, sir. Perhaps it was just an innate something in me that made me do it. You see, before I went to work for Mr. Darling, I had been his friend and companion, as I told you. And I wouldn't like anything to happen that would—but—

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but we'll talk about that later, if you don't mind."

"I'm as mixed up now as I'll ever be," answered Flinty McNeall. "But don't mind me. If you've got anything else on your chest, sling it off. What's the ——"

The old man looked up quizzically.

"I don't suppose you ever studied the human hand?"

"I've studied the itchin' palm, if that's what you mean," Flinty answered with a laugh. "Take Whitey here—when I don't give him money, he just up and gloms it. But pardon me for buttin' in. You were saying something about palms——"

"No—hands. The backs of hands. The correlation of the veins, and their corresponding continuity."

Flinty McNeall's eyes opened wider.

"S-o-m-e words!" he breathed admiringly. "Say, if I could slap the dictionary around like that, I'd duck the circus business in ten minutes. What's it mean in common, ordinary English?"

"The way the veins lay on the back of the hand, and the way they run in connection with each other. For instance—" he held forth his own, withered hand— "the veins on the back of my hand are very round and uneven. A part of that is due to age. Otherwise, they have always been that way.

"You see, sir," he added with a reversion to his butler-like attitude, "before I had misfortune that sent me to Mr. Darling as a servant instead of a comrade as I had always been before, I took a course in anatomy. And the veins of the hands always fascinated me. I made a study of them. In the last few weeks, certain things have come up that have caused me to think a great deal. And I wondered whether you would come out to the house and make a few comparisons with me—of your memory and certain photographs that were taken some twenty-odd years ago. Mrs. Darling had a very peculiar marking—quite pretty, but peculiar, sir, and ——"

"Gosh!" The voice was Big Whitey's. "Remember that night, Cap, in the car? Remember where I was standin'? I could look right down and ——"

"That's enough, Whitey!" Flinty McNeall turned with a slight frown. Then with a quick look at the old butler— "You want me to come out to the house and do this?"

"It's impossible to do it otherwise."

"All right. I'm willing." The eyes of the little showman McNeall were gleaming feverishly bright. His fingers were twitching. "But what's Miss Darling and the old man going to say about me snooping around like this?"

"They'll not be there, sir."

"No?"

"No, sir. It's after nine o'clock now, sir, and Mr. Darling always goes for his walk along the bridle path about that time. He takes quite a long walk every night, sir. Sometimes he does not get home until nearly midnight. And Miss Darling, sir, is never in."

"Society stuff, eh?"

"Quite opposite. She's a great deal like Mr. Darling in that respect. There is hardly a night that she stays in the house——"

"Out with the old man, eh?"

"Never, sir. They both take their long walks at night, but never together. Miss Darling evidently goes for miles. She says that it is her early life in the woods that makes her crave the fresh air—often she comes in with mud on her shoes and her clothing showing that she has been tramping through briars and underbrush. But they're never together. We'd be quite safe, I'm sure of that, sir—if you'll only come."

"But——"

"If you'll only come, sir!" The old butler had taken a step or two forward, his hands half outstretched, a pleading expression in his eyes that was pitiable to see. "If you'll only come—I can't say what's in my mind now—it may be only the queer thoughts of an old man. But if you'll only come out to the house, and let me talk to you there and let me ask you certain questions—I know you'll not be sorry, sir. I know ——"

"Never mind the rest, kid." Flinty McNeall had reached for the door-knob. "Grab your hat, Whitey. We're going out with his nibs here."

A HALF-HOUR'S ride in a taxicab and they alighted to approach the shadowy form of the Darling mansion. It was evident that Mr. Darling and his daughter had gone—each for their walk of the night. The windows were dark—even the hall, neglected by the butler in his effort to reach Flinty McNeall,

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remained unlighted. Slowly the old butler reached for his keys as he started toward the house, jingling them as he sought to find the right one by the sense of touch. They started up the lawn, only to turn at a sound of hurrying feet a half block down the sidewalk, then to stop at the sound of an imperative voice.

"Hey—do you belong to the Darling house?"

The old servant squinted toward the approaching figure.

"Yes?" There was a querulous, frightened sound to his voice. "Who is it?"

"Detective Raftery from headquarters." The man was hurrying forward. "Who'm I talking to?"

"Heatherton—Mr. Darling's butler. Is anything wrong, sir?"

"A lot's wrong. We've found Mr. Darling out by the speedway——"

"Hurt, sir—hurt? Don't tell me he's hurt, sir!" The voice of the old man shook with excitement. "What's happened—what's——"

"That's what we're trying to find out. I've left my partner down there looking over the ground. I'm afraid it's all off."

"Dead? Not dead, sir—not dead?"

The old man was almost convulsive now. With a long breath the detective forced himself to the cold announcement:

"Yes. It looks like he's been killed by some animal—that gorilla that escaped!"

A drooling sound of grief broke from the old man. Flinty McNeall, silent until now, turned quickly.

"Whitey!" he announced. "Take care of the old man. Get him into the house there and straighten him out. McNeall's my name, pal," he announced to the detective. "Friend of Bill Griffin, the chief. I'll take a turn down to the speedway with you if you don't mind."

The detective acquiesced, and together they hurried for the spot at the speedway, a half mile distant. Above them an electrical storm was massing its clouds and a slight wind—the vanguard of lightning and thunder—was beginning to stir the branches of the foliage. The detective glanced at the sky.

"Glad we came on the old man when we did," he announced. "If this rain had gotten there first, it'd just about wiped out all the evidence and we'd have had a real mystery then. Now, it doesn't look like much—outside the prominence of Mr. Darling."

Flinty McNeall was almost trotting in his efforts to keep pace with the detective.

"Maybe I'll be able to help out a bit. I'm a circus man. Fact is, I know the fellow that lost the gorilla. Mort Scott. So, if there's any doubt——"

"Not much chance of that. There are one or two footprints in the dust close to the old man's head, and the print of the gorilla's hand on his throat and face. A blind man could see it."

"The old man probably surprised the monk and got him mad," Flinty mused. "A monk'll jump a person mighty quick in a case like that."

"Just about what happened. By the way, can one of these monks hit hard?"

"Hit?" Flinty laughed. "Figure it out yourself. This one weighed three hundred pounds with three-fourths of his muscle in his arms and back. Nothing to their legs, you know. He could crack a man's head with his fist, easy."

"Just about what happened. The old man looks like his head's been caved in by something like that. A sandbag's the only other thing that could do it. Over this way — we turn here."

Flinty swung to the right with the detective and hurried toward where the gleaming rays of a night-light spotted the foliage as it flashed about. There came a call from the detective at the body, to be answered by Raftery. A moment later, Flinty McNeall was bending by the side of the dead man.

THE body lay just at the side of a dusty path on the far side of the speedway, marked by the shoes of hundreds of pedestrians who used the lane as a cut-off between the heights of Rockhill and the lower levels of the Troost Avenue district. By the side of the body, clearly outlined, was the footprint of Casey, the chimpanzee, while on the throat were the marks of the hands of the big brute, where they had been pressed. Flinty gritted his teeth.

"This is going to be tough on Mort," he mused. "They'll hold him responsible for the monk and—let me have your flashlight a minute."

The detective handed him the night-lamp, and with it Flinty began a search of the grass and path nearby.

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"Wonder which way he come?" he asked. "Don't seem to see his tracks over here in the path anywhere."

"Probably not," came the answer of Raftery in the darkness. "The gorilla must have been trailing across the grass. We won't be able to find that out until morning—until we can make a daylight search. And if this rain comes—" he glanced again at the rapidly darkening sky—"anything like that'll be wiped out entirely."

"Don't guess it makes much difference anyhow." Flinty McNeall had returned to the body again and was examining it with a sudden ardor. "By the way, there ain't no stream anywhere near here except Brush Creek, is there?"

"No."

"It's a mud bank anyway, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"No sand anywhere around it?"

"Not a bit."

"Huh." There was silence and then—"Know anything about the old man?"

"Darling? Quite a bit. Me and Ghent've been meeting him around here every night for years."

"Don't know where he usually walked?"

"Sure—up and down this path. He'd keep it up for hours."

"Never got out in the woods or anything like that? Or around the river—where there was sand and cockleburs?"

"Certainly not."

"Just thought I'd ask. There seems to be some river sand sprinkled on his clothes. Guess it shook loose from the hair of the gorilla. He's probably been hiding down around the river."

"There's a cocklebur or two also, isn't there?"

"That's what I thought they were at first," answered Flinty McNeall with a puzzled tone to his voice, "then again I could have bet they were burs from the fantom bramble bushes up on Ghost Island. But that's impossible. No gorilla's going t' swim out to that island—that's a cinch. Gorillas ain't that fond of swimming. Nope, I guess they're just cockleburs. But they sure do look like fantom bramble!"

The detective's somewhat disgruntled answer brought Flinty McNeall to a realization that he was doing more talking than accomplishment. Quickly he turned to the task which he had set for himself.

"You're dead right on the monk stuff, pal," he announced. "These are all gorilla marks. It's just about as you figured it—the old man surprised him in the bushes or something and he let swing o' one blow and crushed in his head. Then he jumped on him and choked him until he was sure he was dead. That's the way with an animal—get scared and they'll have a sort o' spasm. Jump at the first thing they see and tear it to pieces or squeeze it to death. I guess that's about all there is to it."

Detective Raftery turned.

"Ain't much else for us to do but to call the coroner." He looked at Flinty. "You going back to the Darling house?"

"Yeh."

"Then there won't be any need for us chasing up there. You can give them all the dope."

"Sure."

A half hour more and Flinty McNeall sat in the big living-room of the Darling mansion detailing to the worn, grief-stricken butler, the evident story of James Darling's death. Suddenly they stopped at a sound on the veranda, the clicking sound of a key as it sought the lock. The old man straightened.

"It's Miss Darling—" he said brokenly—"I don't know what to do now. I——"

His voice trailed away as the key turned in the lock and the door opened. Silently he sat staring while the sound of footsteps glided across the hall and up-stairs. Flinty looked at him wonderingly, then, suddenly shouldering the responsibility, stepped to the hall.

"Miss Darling!"

The figure on the stairway hesitated just a second, then started on again.

"I'll be right down."

But that second had been enough—enough to cause Flinty McNeall to start as though from an electric shock, to cause his hands to grip at the curtains, and his jaws to set in a sudden, clamping click. He whirled. He motioned Big Whitey to him.

"When that woman comes down-stairs," he whispered, "tell her the whole story just like I've told it, understand? Sympathize with her. Tell her how horrible she must feel. Get me? But you keep her here if you have to choke her!"

"Yes, sir. Somethin' wrong, Cap?"

"I don't know. I've run across two

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things that make me even afraid to think. And I'm going to find out more about it—tonight!"

He swerved to the door. Outside the primary streaks of lightning threw their green glare upon the streets already gleaming with the first burst of rain. From down the block came the clinking sound of tire chains, and Flinty ran forward to hail a taxi and leap to its running-board before it could cease its skidding efforts to stop. Hurriedly he crawled into the seat beside the driver.

"Down to the wharves!" he ordered, "and let's see how fast y' can make it!"

An hour later Miss Mary Darling still sobbed on the shoulder of the white-haired old butler, while Big Whitey again went over the details of the death of James Darling as Flinty McNeall had told them. As for Flinty McNeall—

A huddled little figure in the stern of a motor boat rented for more than its cost, seeking to handle the engine and the steering wheel at the same time, Flinty McNeall was heading out into the main current of the muddy, racing Missouri River, breasting his boat to the swift lash of water, directing it straight up-stream—toward eery, lonely, weird Ghost Island!

XI

THE rain was slicing in driving gusts now, beating into the face of Flinty McNeall as he strove to hold the boat against the treacherous currents of the Big Muddy, the lightning weaving its way across the green-black sky, the thunder rolling and crashing with a nearness that was disconcerting. Drenched and cold was Flinty McNeall, gritting his teeth against the snap of the wind, drenched and cold, but determined.

"Maybe I ought 've brought the cops," he murmured as the boat careened, then straightened again, "maybe I oughtn't. A guy doesn't think of everything in a time like this. All I know is that I'm goin' t' find out what's on Ghost Island—if they's anything there."

He was silent for a moment, while the shimmering city in the distance glided past, temporarily effaced by the quick flare of lightning, then dully glowing again. Finally he resumed the thread of his reflections, figuring on the things that had sent him out alone, into the swirling Missouri, on a lone chase to a deserted island.

"Le's see," he mused. "First of all that old guy comes to me and just th' same as says that he's got a hunch that Miss Darling ain't Miss Darling. But if she ain't, what's she doing with them affidavits? And if she ain't who is? Is she in cahoots with this other one—gosh, I give that up! Then, the next thing I know, me'n Whitey sail out there t' find that the old man's been bounced on the bean and put out of the running. I mosey around and what do I find? River sand, sprinkled on his clothes and a couple of burs from the fantom bramble. And I know they were fantom bramble!"

He pulled hard at the wheel again, saving the boat from being swept into an eddy. Then with the nose of his little craft headed straight against the lapping current, with the rain beating harder than ever, he once more turned to his conclusions.

"After that—what? I ramble up to the house and in sails Miss Darling. I stop her on the stairs and I can see her shoes and her skirt. And what's there? River sand or I'll eat this blamed engine! River sand and a whole mass o' fantom bramble. And fantom bramble, 'less it's switched its likes and dislikes a lot in the last fifteen years, don't like th' soil anywhere around here, except on Ghost Island. What was that monk doing on that island? And what was that woman doing at the same place? And blast me for a codfish if I ain't going to find out!"

A double glare of lightning blazed its way across the sky, revealing before Flinty McNeall the weaving arms of giant sycamores as they brushed the sky, the dirty, jagged stretches of cut sand-banks, the wide flats of marshes, that marked Ghost Island. Weird under ordinary conditions, the place seemed even more so now, a thing of shadows and impenetrable depths, of rough outlines and eery suggestions, of ghostlike feature and ghostlike aspect.

Flinty doubled his neck into his shoulders. He became suddenly silent, a tense, grim-faced little being, straining at the wheel of his boat, struggling to keep it from the changeable currents which swept about the lower end of the island, and hold it to the current until he could make a landing.

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Far out into the river he swung, skirting the dull mass of foliage and reeds, a sodden mass now in the dull blackness of the night, cutting across the eddies and whirlpools, making for the smooth water just at the edge of the big maelstrom at the head of the island.

It was a hard pull and a long pull—a course defined only by the occasional flashes from the sky, but some way he made it. A quick turn, a sudden cessation of the engine and Flinty McNeall's boat crept into the comparatively still water that lurked in the marshes.

Stealthily Flinty rose in the boat and reached for the low-hanging branches that he might draw his craft nearer the mainland. Every flash of lightning sent him dodging into the bottom of the boat, every crash of thunder caused him to work all the faster under the cover of its noise. At last the grating of wood on sand, and Flinty, somewhat gingerly, went over the side to tie off the boat to a water willow and start through the low-hanging brush toward shore.

A grim journey it was, a journey which caused his flesh to crawl and his teeth to chatter—and Flinty was not a man who was afraid. All about him, things were stirring—marsh birds that huddled close in the matted vegetation, then screamed with fright as they swirled into the air, so close to Flinty that their wings seemed to beat against his face; slimy reeds, masses of bent and torn willows, matted in the water to make a treacherous footing beneath him, all disproportioned in the writhing motion born of the storm-wind, all the more unearthly in the driving rain, the thunder and the green rockets of the lightning.

Once Flinty stumbled forward, to grasp at a log, then to draw back shivering as something slid from it into the water. Only a great turtle, it was true—but Flinty McNeall was in an unreal world. Once a muskrat, weaving its way through the water, struck against him, clawed uncertainly, then veered, leaving Flinty cringing at the touch of the unknown.

A great flock of blackbirds, driven out of their roosting place of the night by a burning streak of lightning which had felled the tree, swirled and dived and croaked about him. Flinty, cursing now, fought his way through them—then suddenly veered. Land was before him. A few steps more and he was on the firm ground of the island.

There Flinty dropped to the ground and swore, gaspingly.

"Of all the fools!" he announced to himself. "Here I am. On Ghost Island. And what good's it going to do me? Some o' these times I'll get enough sense t' take help when I need it. They's only four square miles o' this island. There's one o' me. And I'm trying to solve a murder mystery!"

The trip through the water had disheartened him. It had seemed hours since he had left his boat—yet peering out through the rushes, he could see that it was barely fifty feet away. Somewhat nervously he felt toward his hip pocket, where he had carried his automatic ever since the night of the shot during the Wild West. It was safe—and dry. In case of danger, there would be consolation in that, at least. As to the island. . . .

Flinty set his jaws and wagged his head a bit doggedly.

"I'm here," he announced to himself, "and I'm going to stay here until I find out what I'm after!"

HE STARTED forward, skirting the dull gray of possible quicksands about him. Slowly he made his way toward higher ground, and toward what memory told him would be the old pavilions and shelter houses of the prize-fight arena. Doggedly he scrambled along, forgetting in the whistle of the storm to guard himself against unnecessary noise, guiding himself by the lightning flashes, struggling on through the close-lying, white-plumed bramble toward—

A wave of green tore its way across the sky, outlining the white trunks and waving branches of the sycamores, the nodding plumes of the fantom bramble, the stretches of sand, the irregular mound that Flinty had believed to be the jutting stump of some long-departed tree before him. Again the lightning and Flinty bent forward. For the mound of earth was a mound of earth—while just beyond was the gaping rectangle of a new-dug grave, awaiting its dead!

A croaking gasp stuck in the throat of Flinty McNeall. A grave! Freshly dug—the smooth, cloddy spadefuls of earth forming the mound only beginning to disintegrate in the driving rain of the first

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storm. A grave—and on an island supposed to be deserted. A grave——

Flinty whirled in a paroxysm of excitement. All about him was light, blinding, gleaming white light, centering from a glowing spot-light on the river, heading straight toward Ghost Island, and catching Flinty McNeall full in its glare!

Face forward on the ground went the little circus-owner. It was certain he had been seen, for the spot-light was searching now, searching in an evident desire to find him, to again outline him against the bramble and the sycamores. There was just one thing to do—and Flinty McNeall did it. Wriggling forward, he reached the shelter of a clump of willows. Then straight into the water he went, plunging onward toward his own boat.

A splashing, frantic journey. A hurried turn at the flywheel of the engine, while the spot-light swung and circled. The *put-put* of the exhaust as the engine swung into action, and Flinty McNeall, with a quick jerk at the tie-off rope, threw the gear into reverse, and regardless of danger to propeller or to shafting, fought his way through the marshes and into the current.

Out in the river, the course of the bigger launch had suddenly swerved. The sound of a voice came through the pattering swish of the driving rain, a voice shouting orders, as the spot-light gleamed on the muddy waters and the unknown craft swung in the current for pursuit. Flinty bent low in his boat, struggling with the wheel as he sent the gear into forward, and strove to circle into the eddy that would throw him far above the pursuing boat and into swifter, yet safer currents on the other side of the island.

But impossible. His boat had been caught broadside on and was fighting vainly. Again and again the searchlight swung its circle. Nearer and nearer it came as the larger boat coursed with comparative safety through the criss-crossing currents. Nearer—nearer—

The gleam caught him full. A shout from the distance. Flinty McNeall, forgetting his steering wheel for a second, whirled in his position, and reached for his automatic. For just a second it caught in his pocket—and in that second a bullet from the beyond chipped a splinter from the rail of his craft. Then his automatic came forth, to be aimed instinctively at that thing of gleaming white which dazzled and blinded him.

A spit of fire, yellow in the white glare—then a clinking noise as the bullet splintered the glass of the search-light and the reflector behind it, leaving a blue, aimless flame of acetylene to mingle with the sweep of the lightning. The search-light was gone.

Gone—but his position had been revealed—a boat swinging aimlessly, unguided in the swift-rushing currents of the Missouri. Into a pocket went the automatic, while Flinty leaped once more to the wheel, striving doggedly to right his course which now seemed to be running in aimless circles, whipped here, there, and back again by the lashing currents.

Once more the lightning, once more a shot from the launch. Closer it came, until Flinty could see its heavier, more powerful outlines almost towering above him. Straight toward him it rushed, while Flinty strove desperately to run with the current, to dart from the course of this heavier, more powerful speedster which bore down upon him.

Again a voice, again a shot. It clipped a spoke from the wheel in front of Flinty, numbing his fingers, and swerving the boat from the course to which it had nearly righted itself. Then, the powerful exhaust of its engine mingling with the sudden crashing of thunder, the heavier boat swerved straight for him—and not twenty feet away.

Flinty spun the wheel in a last, mad endeavor. It was useless. Kicking the muddy water of the Missouri from its prow, the bigger boat raced head on toward him, then veered not five feet away, to catch his small craft in a side-sweeping, upending manner, swinging it high on its side. A long instant of uncertainty, in which the boat seemed to fairly rise above the water. Then with a strange, sickening, catapulting motion, it capsized, carrying Flinty over with it and imprisoning him beneath its upturned hull.

XII

SPUTTERING and gasping, Flinty McNeall came to the surface from his quick ducking, and from the oily taste of the water and the utter darkness, he knew that he still was under the overturned boat, drifting with the current.

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Almost simultaneously, a sudden jarring and scraping told him that the other boat had returned and was clinging alongside.

Faintly there came a sound that chilled Flinty more than the cold grasp of the water—the voice of George Jordan, the Trembler. At first the words were indistinct as though from a far end of the bigger motor-launch. Then they came nearer.

"Nothing back there. I've looked all around with the flash-light. He must be under the boat."

"Maybe he's dead."

"Dead? From what?"

"Drowned."

"He would have come up, wouldn't he?"

The Trembler evidently was leaning over the side of the boat now. His voice was quite close. Flinty McNeall held tight to the upturned seat of his craft and sought to raise himself a bit from the water that he might hear the better. Faintly he heard the Trembler talking again.

"I've got a hunch he's under that boat. He didn't show himself in the water when it went over. I ought to know. I used enough wind-matches."

There was silence for a moment. The power of the larger boat had been shut off and the two were drifting together. Evidently the occupants of the larger craft had anchored themselves to the overturned boat and were traveling side by side with it. Flinty shivered in the cold current, and struggled to keep his head above water. He was caught now—caught, a prisoner under the boat as long as the Trembler and his larger craft remained alongside. And that was not to be an easy task.

The boat was twirling and turning with the tide. Under its upturned surface, a bare six inches of air space remained, heavy with the odor of the engine, with a biting odor that stung his nostrils and throat. Flinty wanted to cough—yet restrained himself. A cough would have meant . . . .

But they were talking again.

"You think he's under there—honest?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't I? There was a big flash of lightning just after the boat went over. You didn't see anything of him in the river, did you? Then didn't we circle around, with me using the wind-matches? If he'd been anywhere in the water, he would have come to the surface by that time. Couldn't have drowned without making a little fight for his life."

"Well, why worry about him?" The second man seemed a trifle impatient. "We've got things to think about on the island. Let's forget about him. He'll drown anyway."

"Forget nothing!" The voice of the Trembler was hard and cold. "I've got too much to settle up with him. What's Slovak Jack doing in the back end of the boat there?"

Slovak Jack! Flinty's eyes widened in the darkness. The mention of the name almost made him glad of his misfortune.

Up above, the Trembler had given an order, only to be interrupted by the crashing of thunder. Again he repeated—

"Jack!"

"Yaas."

"Bring me that shotgun out of the cabin."

"Shotgun?" It was an unknown man who had interrupted. "What're you figuring on doing?"

"Putting a hole through that boat. I'll find out whether that fellow's under there or not."

"Don't do it. We're too far out in the channel. Sound carries to beat the deuce in a place like this. They could hear a shotgun a mile away."

"Suppose they did."

"And suppose they found this fellow's body tomorrow some time with his head blown off. They'd start searching the island, wouldn't they?"

"We'll be gone by then."

"Yes, but we've got to make our getaway. And we don't want any shotgun reports sounding around this river tonight."

"You're right." The Trembler was silent again.

Underneath the boat, Flinty McNeall removed one numbed hand from its grasping place, and rubbed it mercilessly against his teeth to restore the circulation. Then quickly he did the same with the other. Above, the Trembler was talking again.

"All right. I've got a——"

The words ceased suddenly to give way to an exclamation of distress, then a long, half-groaning sigh. Flinty knew the reason —that menacing, trembling hand had been seized in one of its paroxysms, shutting off all thought of action until it was over.

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Then, when the words came again, they sounded fainter and farther away, as though the Trembler were making his way to the rear end of the boat.

"How about that hose?"

"You mean for the exhaust?"

"Yes. Where is it? Get it out."

"Yaas. I get it." It was Slovak Jack who answered.

"All right. Then attach it to the exhaust of our boat, and swing the back end around so that we're even with the exhaust of this other tub, here. When you get that done, turn on the engine. Wait a minute. Hey, up front—have you got that other boat lashed all right?"

"I've got the anchor caught over it. I'm holding it at the side here with a bar-hook."

"Can you take it up-stream that way—will it hold if we start our boat?"

"Yes. We'd better be doing it pretty quick, too. The first thing we know we'll be below the island."

"All right. As soon as Jack gets that hose attached."

"Hose?" Flinty McNeall cocked his head and half shook himself in the water. What were they going to do with a hose attached to the exhaust? The Trembler had spoken of it as though it were a better scheme than a shotgun, a better way of . . . .

But the churning of the propeller of the bigger boat cut off all possible explanation. Faintly Flinty could hear the sound of voices—but the words were inaudible, drowned in the noise of the launch and the whirring of the engine. What were they going to do with that hose? What. . . .

The exhaust of the other boat seemed suddenly to grow nearer. The voiced directions of the Trembler seemed louder. There came the answering voice of Slovak Jack, as though shouting above the noise of the engine.

Then, with a sudden, crackling sensation, the exhaust seemed to burst directly into the small air-space above Flinty, causing his ears to ring with the heavy echoes, his head suddenly to ache, with a bulging, heavy, depressing sensation. And at the same time the penetrating odor of gas stung his nostrils, cutting at the tender membranes, tearing its way into his lungs, stifling him, suffocating him.

Flinty knew now! They had chosen the sure way! That hose had been attached from the active exhaust of the bigger boat, straight to the dead exhaust of the smaller one, and was forcing the noxious, deadly fumes of burning gasoline through the cut-off of Flinty's engine and into the narrow confine of air that meant his very life!

DOGGEDLY the little circus-owner gritted his teeth and sought not to breathe any more than was possible. Grimly he buried his nostrils and mouth in the cup of his shoulder, where his raised arms, heightened that he might cling the better to the seat above, formed a natural curvature for his face. The wet clothing formed a sort of barrier or mask against the fumes, filtering them, as it were, and holding back some of the poisonous gas.

But only for a time. Then the noxious, cutting odor began to penetrate again, and desperately Flinty swung his head to the other shoulder, availing himself of the freedom of the masked air there. But the relief was only momentary. Steadily, thoroughly, the gas fumes were eating up the last of the free atmosphere of the overturned boat. Slowly, gradually, the poisoned exhaust was dragging the life of Flinty McNeall out of his very lungs, out of his very being!

He began to gasp, painfully, desperately. He could feel his eyes bulging, his tongue hanging over the lips that he knew to be purple. Great red and white flares ran through his throbbing brain, strange noises, crashing sounds—he could feel that his numbed fingers were beginning to slip from their cramped hold on the seat of the little boat. Death was approaching him, death that was stalking in every poisoned inch of that little air-chamber which should have meant his life, death that was clutching at his throat, that was burning out his very existence, that was—

But suddenly from without there came shouts, hurried directions, the scraping of the anchor on the side of the boat—a sudden cessation of the exhaust, a quick swinging motion of the boat as it once more floated free into the current. A swift swirl of water, as though from a passing propeller, then silence.

Flinty did not know what had happened. Flinty hardly cared. All he knew, all he could understand was that the bigger boat had suddenly veered away and that he

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must avail himself of the opportunity to seek escape. He summoned every ounce of his remaining strength. His clutched hands loosed from their hold above. With a quick effort, he forced himself downward into the water, struggled to hold the poisoned breath in his lungs as long as possible, then fought his way to the surface again.

Air! Free, clean, cold air! The air of the storm beating swiftly upon him, the clear air of the night, free from the poison of gases, free from the horrible, burning, devitalizing influence that had torn at his lungs a moment before. Twenty feet away, his overturned boat was drifting with the current, while, a hundred yards farther on, the big motor-boat was dashing downstream in evident pursuit of something—what, Flinty did not know. Nor did he wait to ascertain. With all his vigor he breasted the current, and pulling with the aid of the eddy that swung toward the lower end of Ghost Island, he began to fight his way toward shore.

Once he looked back at the sound of angry voices. A flash-light was gleaming from the boat, where several figures were dragging something from the river, only to curse it and throw it back again. But it told the story. A floating log in the darkness, careening away with the current. A chase by the Trembler, believing that log to be the body of Flinty McNeall, and now—the realization. Flinty McNeall crinkled a corner of his mouth in a grim little grin. The fight was still on!

But a fight against odds. Down the river, the big boat circled, searched, made for the overturned motor-boat again, then gave up the chase. Now and then, as he fought dazedly against the currents, Flinty McNeall caught a glimpse of its black, shadowy form as it made its way up the river, finally to lose itself in the darkness as it rounded toward the upper end of the island. He was safe from the Trembler for a time at least—but there were still the currents of the Missouri to master.

Beaten by the eddies, by the swift swirls and cross-currents, he fought his way forward. Slow was his progress—an advance, then a defeat which negatived all his efforts, leaving him still drifting, still struggling. The current was carrying him swiftly down the river.

A hundred yards more and he would be clear of the lower end of the island, with only a forlorn hope of being able to keep on the surface until some friendly current would sweep him to either shore. And that hope was too distant to consider. He must fight now—and summoning the remainder of his enfeebled strength, Flinty McNeall laid himself against the eddies and cut for the shore.

A battle that was that sapped his strength, that seemed to tear the very muscles from his arms, that battered him and baffled him and all but defeated him. Time and again he seemed within reach of the current-gnawed bank, only to be swept away again, with the battle to fight all over again. Time and again he made the effort, at last to grasp at the low-hanging willows, to slip, to slide, to struggle upward and fall exhausted upon the shore of the lower end of the island.

The storm had abated somewhat. Flinty hardly knew it. All that he realized was that he lay on firm ground, that he could rest, that he could ease his gasping, agonized lungs, that he was safe from one of his trials at least. Long he lay there, then, stiff and aching, he rose and with a new burst of the storm, struggled aimlessly forward.

Where he was going—or why, he did not know. But he did know that somewhere on that island was the headquarters of the Trembler, and that with him was that person called Slovak Jack.

Slovak Jack! It brought a new mystery to the whole conglomeration that had held the attention of Flinty McNeall for nearly a month now. Slovak Jack—and the Trembler! Slovak Jack and the woman who occupied the big home of James Darling, who now would come into the possession of his fortune with the death of the aged millionaire.

And in this new angle of things, what was the hypotenuse, the connecting link? Where was the bright-eyed, wondrous-haired little girl who had stolen his watch from his private car the night of the circus fire, and who now was being sought by the police as a fugitive from justice? What part did she occupy in all this tangled mesh of circumstance? What was her rôle, what was her identity?

Flinty McNeall blinked at the question and passed it by. There were other things to think about now—what he would do on

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this island, now that he had gained his foothold, how he would spy out the Trembler and what means he would seek to prevent his leaving. For Flinty McNeall, as he struggled through the tangled masses of fantom bramble, realized that perhaps he was in a worse position than before.

He was on Ghost Island, that was true. But he was almost as much of a prisoner as though he had been bound by the hands of the Trembler. Ghost Island was in the middle of the Missouri River. It was a mile to either shore. There was no means of signaling—no one to whom to signal. He had no boat. The Trembler and his mates were preparing to depart, thus turning a temporary defeat into a victory, and leaving Flinty behind, marooned and helpless.

Instinctively Flinty reached for his automatic. It was gone, lost in the overturning of the boat. The storm was rising again, the lightning flashing and gleaming once more, lighting Flinty's way through the sycamores and the knotted willows. Fatigue was hanging heavily upon him; his feet dragged, his shoulders sagged as he fought his way through one clump of matted vegetation after another.

He swayed, then bracing himself, suddenly changed his course. Standing out dully before him showed the outline of something that looked like a small shack or lean-to, a relic of the days when Ghost Island was populated by the drifters and hangers-on of gambling and prize-fighting. It would at least be dry within, at least warmer than out here in the chilling bite of the storm wind. Flinty brightened. In there, he could rest and regain perhaps a part of his vigor. And he needed every bit of his strength now.

He turned into a half-clearing and almost ran for the proffered shelter. Gropingly he searched the clapboard walls for an opening, kicking against them for the yielding sound of a door. At last his touch discerned the rough casement. He reached for the rusty old latch, pushed it down and leaned against the door, as it creaked open—

A screaming voice. The cracking spit of a revolver and the warm gush of a bullet past his head, as the flare of the shot outlined him in the opening of the door. Then a voice from the darkness, wholehearted, sincere:

"Thank God, you're human! I thought you was the varmint! Come in!"

XIII

BUT Flinty was taking no chances. Quickly he placed himself behind the protecting abutment of the door, and shouted an order within.

"Who are you?"

"Waldo Jenkins—who're you?"

"Flinty McNeall's my name. Flinty McNeall of the Great Hippodrome Circus."

It was a chance—for Flinty McNeall was playing his one card of identification. That name would mean either a fight or . . . .

"Come in, partner. You shore scart me!"

Flinty McNeall squinted his eyes. It was apparent from the answer that the man within never had heard the name before. But why should this unknown person be on Ghost Island? Why . . . But Flinty gave up the problem of deduction and determined upon actualities. He leaned forward from his protection and called an order above the sudden rush of the newly infuriated storm.

"If you're friendly, light a lamp and let's see you."

"Why not scratch a match yourself, stranger? Folks are scarce on Ghost Island. There's only me here—and the varmint."

"Think so? There may be more than that. Turn on that light. I'm talkin' straight—understand? Now, turn on that light."

"Just as soon as I find a match, stranger."

There was a sound of shuffling and grumbling from within. Then at last a match flickered, a tiny gleam shone through the crack of the door, where Flinty was watching. Within, he saw a strange conglomeration.

Inside the shack stood a weather-beaten old man, fussing with the ragged wick of the burning lamp. Knotted and gnarled he was, with hands cramped out of shape by the ravages of rheumatism, with a beard that had grown long and matted. A sort of a relic, a strange, queer, unkempt being he was, standing there in the flickering light of the lamp that threw strange shadows about a room as queer as the old man himself.

Everywhere was débris—here the broken footboard of a bed, mud-marked and dirty, here a bundle of rags, boxes and kegs and

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barrels, and brooms—all salvaged from the floods of the river during its Spring rampages. In a corner stood a rifle, old and rusty, and with it a sawed-off shotgun. In another corner, leering in an awry manner, leaned a department store dummy, mud-marked as was everything else, its once beautiful clothing now torn and dirty and water-stained, clinging to it in gawky, awkward fashion. A clinking sound and the old man placed the chimney on the lamp. Then he turned.

"I've laid my cards on the table, pardner," he announced. "Come in."

Flinty McNeall stepped forward, and into the little shack, pulling the door tight behind him.

"I'm sorry to have made you do all this here," he announced in a tone of friendliness. "I didn't expect to find nobody on this island 'cepting enemies."

"Enemies?" The old man looked up queerly. "There ain't nobody on this island except me 'n' the varmint. I wisht I could find out what he is," he added somewhat fearfully. "You've been in the water, pardner."

"Yeh." Flinty McNeall looked at his drenched clothing, and reaching into a bedraggled pocket, pulled forth the sodden mass of money there. "Got anything dry you could sell me?"

"I'll fix you up, pardner. Turn over in the river or somethin'?"

"Something!" Flinty McNeall's eyes followed the old man as he dragged forth some old clothing from beneath the dirty bunk that ran along one side of the shack. "What was that you were saying about an animal?"

The old man opened his eyes.

"It's a varmint of some kind. I hear it at night. That's who I thought you was when I heard you foolin' around th' outside o' th' shack. That's why I shot. It's kind o' got on my nerves. I don't come over here much."

"No?"

"I just been here three days." The old man was scrutinizing the worn clothing. "I'm a river rat, I am. Don't work much. Come over here in the Spring an' gather up what's lodged on the island durin' the floods. Then 'long toward this time, when I get broke, I come over here an' get it an' sell it down t' the city for a few pennies. That's how I got my wife there."

He laughed in a dry, cackling fashion, and pointed to the awry dummy in the corner.

"Few days ago, I come over here to get some stuff. Didn't tie my boat good and it drifted away. Had a case o' canned goods that'd washed on the island, so I didn't fret much. One place's good as another for me, so I didn't care—until I heard the varmint."

"The varmint?" Flinty McNeall, pulling off his wet clothing, watched the old man with a puzzled look in his eyes. "What's it like?"

The old man extended his knotted hands. His eyes went wide. His mouth twitched slightly with fear.

"It ain't like nothin' on God's green earth, pardner," he announced. "I ain't heard it tonight. But other nights, when the wind's right, it'll come t' me, from 'way up th' island, screechin' an' howling, just like a soul that didn't have a body—or somethin'. I promised myself I'd find out what it was."

"Yeh."

The old man smiled, queerly.

"But I didn't. I was afraid. I've been in the shack here ever since."

Flinty stopped in his dressing.

"And you haven't been around the island at all?"

The old man shook his head.

"No, sirree. It ain't a good place at best, this island. There's marshes in it where you'll not come out again. There's bramble patches where you can't find your way. Then there's the sycamores, always whisperin', whisperin', whisperin'—an' you don't feel so good when you're listenin' to 'em. I started out once, I took my gun along, swearin' I was goin' t' find out what that screechin' howlin' thing was. But I got out in the sycamore, where th' blackbirds were circlin' an' callin', and where everything was kinda skeery an' ghostlike—an' I just turned back. I had to, pardner. My old legs wouldn't carry me no farther!"

FLINTY was pulling on a too-large coat over the rough shirt. His body was glowing in the new warmth of the uncouth but dry clothing. Curiously he watched the old man as he went to the window and peered out at the sweeping storm, wondering just how to break the news that he wanted aid—aid to seek out

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the Trembler and his band, aid to solve the mystery that occupied the upper end of the island, the mystery of the black motor boat and the open, gaping grave. As for the old man, he peered out curiously.

"The wind's changin'," he announced nervously. "It's veerin' around the other way, headin' down from the north now. It'll——"

Then suddenly he stood molded in terror, his gnarled old hands clutching, his mouth half open and sagging, his eyes bulging and glazed with fear. From up the island had come the sound of a screeching shriek, wild, weird, riding higher and higher, then cutting off into snapping, staccato howls, the eery voice of the varmint. The old man turned, trembling.

"Listen to it!" he gasped. "Listen to it—ain't it enough to chill your blood? Can't y' hear it, pardner, can't——"

But Flinty McNeall had leaped to the door and opened it slightly that he might hear the better. His head was bent forward. His eyes were narrowed, his hands white with the pressure against the door.

"That's a monk!" he almost shouted. "A monk that's mad—an' fighting or somethin'!"

" A monk?" The old man had come forward.

"Yeh." Flinty was snapping his words now. "A chimpanzee—blackfaced. Call 'em gorillas, but they're not. It's a monk and I think I know which one it is!"

The howls from the distance died away. Flinty McNeall shut the door and turned to the still frightened old man.

"Don't need to be worried about that there varmint, as you call it," he announced. "It ain't him that's going t' cause you trouble. It's what's with him. You say you ain't been out to the upper end of this island."

"Not this trip, no sir."

"Y' don't know whether anybody's up there or not?"

"No—nothin' except the varmint. An' that——"

"What about the buildings up there? Any one of them fit to live in—where somebody could make a camp or something like that?"

"Yes. The fight pavilion. It's cut up in dressing-rooms. I used to stay up there—then I found this little shack down here and liked it better."

"That the only place?"

"Yes."

"O. K. How about them guns over there in the corner? They working?"

"Those?" The old man looked fondly toward the two weapons. "Yes, they'll both work. They're both loaded. I've had 'em ready ever since I heard the varmint. Th' shotgun's th' best o' th' two."

"Good. I may want to borrow one o' em. I've——"

But again his sentence was cut short by the sounds from the distance. Again sounded the cry of the varmint, howling and yelling and screeching, its yowls seeming to grow closer with every instant. From far away there came the echo of a man's shout, then the cracking noise of a revolver shot.

Flinty McNeall leaped to the door again and opened it. The old man reached forth a trembling hand for the sawed-off shotgun and stood holding it before him, irresolute, half-frantic with the fear that the weird sounds from the distance had fastened upon him.

Again and again, approaching closer and closer. Then a sound which stopped the blood in the veins of Flinty McNeall—the scream of a woman, high and hysterical, echoing over the island like the wail of a wraith.

"Gimme that gun!" Flinty McNeall had turned, his face white, his eyes glistening. "Get a brace on yourself. Things are happening. Follow me!"

Quickly he took the rifle that the old man had handed him from the corner. Hurriedly he sped out the door and into the clearing. The cries of the animal were echoing again—but this time farther away. Plainly it had turned in its course and was heading once more toward the north end of the island. Flinty, the old man panting beside him, hurried on.

"We might as well fight it out now," he breathed. "We've got it to do some time—and it might as well be right this minute. Old man," he half turned as they struggled along, "all I can tell you is that I'm a friend of Chief Griffin of Kansas City. There's something wrong up at the head of this island and we've got to get the straight of it. So it's up to you to be game and—what's that?"

A stirring of the willows had sounded to their right. Hurriedly they swerved and rushed forward. The storm had lessened

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now and the sky had lightened, revealing the surroundings in dun shadows. Flinty's hands tightened on the rifle as he crouched under the low-hanging branches and rushed forward in pursuit of the sound. Behind him came the old man, gasping, stumbling in his efforts to pick his way along in the darkness.

"It's the varmint," he choked out, "I know it's the varmint!"

"Keep quiet!"

Flinty McNeall ducked his head between his shoulders and half raised the rifle. Again had come a stealthy sound from the fantom bramble beyond, as of some one crawling and creeping along. Once more the old man began his gasping plea:

"It's the varmint! We've got to be careful. We've——"

"Keep quiet, will you!" Flinty McNeall turned and scowled in the darkness. "This ain't no time for talking. Hurry around that way and head it off, whatever it is. It can't keep away from us much longer. The river's just on the other side—now scoot!"

With a quick pull at his breath, the old man obeyed. Then suddenly he halted, swerved and ran back to Flinty.

"It's in that patch of bramble!" he gasped. "I saw it—it started up, then it seemed to fall back again. Listen—listen!"

From the fantom bushes just opposite them came a low, moaning sound as from some human in pain. Flinty McNeall felt the muscles along his back stiffen. He turned quickly.

"Around that way!" he ordered, and the old man obeyed.

Slowly, their guns raised for instant action, they approached the bramble, where still the gasping moans continued. Slowly they approached—foot by foot. Then they stopped. Flinty McNeall turned swiftly and lowered his rifle, then bent quickly forward.

"Come out of there!" he ordered. "I won't hurt you."

There was silence. The old man came to his side.

"What is it?"

"A woman—or I'm crazy!" came the answer of Flinty McNeall. "Light a match."

The old man obeyed. The flame flickered dully in the stiff breeze, then died out. But in that instant, Flinty McNeall had seen, Flinty McNeall had dropped his gun to hurry forward into the bramble and bend by the side of the exhausted, half-hysterical form there.

"It's me!" he called quickly. "It's me—Flinty McNeall! Don't you know me?"

"Help me—help me—" came the droning, unknowing voice from the ground. "If you're human, help me! They've had my grave dug for days! They've——"

Unconsciousness had come. Swiftly Flinty McNeall gathered the form in his arms—there was no resistance—and rose with it. Then he turned to the wondering old man behind him.

"Light a match!" he ordered. Then as the gleam flared again, Flinty McNeall looked into the white face of the unconscious girl, a grim expression shining in his eyes.

"Just as I thought!" he muttered. "It's the girl from Midcurrent!"

XIV

BACK at the cabin, Flinty McNeall hurried within and placed his burden on the old bunk, the river rat following wonderingly in the rear. Flinty noticed the stare in his eyes and smiled slightly. Then he returned to the chafing of the girl's wrists and temples, talking over his shoulder as he did so.

"Never mind the explanations right now, old man. I don't even know myself. Turn out that light!"

Quite obediently, the grizzled old river rat lowered the wick of the lamp, then with a puff of his breath placed the room in darkness.

"Don't mind me," came his companion-like answer. "I've been in scrapes before. The varmint's all that's worryin' me."

"That ain't going to hurt you. The people t' worry about are the men you heard shooting. They're the ones."

"They're gone by now."

"Off the island? Don't you think it. Not as long as this girl's out of their hands. Gosh, I think she's coming to."

Flinty McNeall bent forward in the darkness and smoothed the hair away from the girl's forehead.

"Get me some water on a rag," he ordered, and the old man obeyed.

Gently Flinty McNeall laid it across the

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eyes of the little being on the bed. There was a slight movement. Flinty's heart thumped happily.

"Feeling better?" he asked quietly.

The answer came in a cry of astonishment. Flinty McNeall pressed his hands against her shoulders.

"Don't get excited, kiddie," he ordered. "It's me, Flinty McNeall. What was the row?"

For a moment the girl lay still. Then she stirred uneasily and started to raise herself again. Once more Flinty pressed her back to the bunk, then laughed.

"Are you really Flinty McNeall?" The voice from the bunk was wondering. "Where——"

"Where are you? Occupying the royal couch o' one of our best known river rats. Feeling better?"

"Am I safe?" There was a sudden gripping fear in the voice.

"Safer'n a national bank. You're so safe that I want t' know what you meant by taking my watch and beating it away from the circus train that night."

"Your watch?"

"That's just about what I said. Listen—" and he bent forward—"if you've got a story, tell it quick. There ain't much time to lose. There's men on this island that I've got to settle things with. Men that——"

"I know them. One of them was the man I used to believe was my father. The other is George Jordan, the Trembler."

"There's still another one. Who's he?"

"He was the constable of Channelville, Oregon. He's dead now. The gorilla killed him tonight."

"The gorilla?" It was a querulous voice from the darkness as the old man came forward. "Then that's what the varmint was. Where's it gone to? What'd it look like? Why'd——"

"We'll find out all about that pretty soon, old kid," cut in the voice of Flinty McNeall. "There's more important stuff right now. You said something about the constable of Channelville. What's he got to do with things?"

"I—I don't know, except that he was a friend of the Trembler's. When they caught me on the circus train and——"

"Caught you?" Flinty McNeall grasped at the shoulders of the girl on the bunk. "Tell me about that, quick. What happened—what do you know about——"

"I don't know anything," came the weak answer. "I just heard a noise in the vestibule and paid no attention to it, thinking it was you. Then the next thing I knew, I had been struck and had fallen to the floor. Somebody picked me up and gave some orders to another man. That's all I knew until I woke up in jail in Channelville."

"And then?"

"Then the constable came in and talked to me. I told him my story—everything. He said that he believed it and would help me. After that, I became nervous and he told me he would give me a hypodermic injection. I didn't want to take it. He insisted. That's all I knew—except for little snatches of consciousness until I found myself on this island, with Slovak Jack and the Trembler. The constable came about a week ago. It seems he was a partner of the Trembler a long time ago and——"

"You say you didn't know anything until they got you on the island here? How——"

"Feel," was the single answer as the girl took Flinty McNeall's hand in the darkness. She pressed it against her arm, where the tiny pinpoint scars, as of a hypodermic needle, had left their raised splotches. "That was how they did it—as soon as one began wearing out, they gave me another. I can remember the pain—like in a dream. Then——"

Outside, and far away, echoed again the wild, eery yowl of the monkey. Flinty McNeall rose quickly.

"They've stirred up that monk again. But they ain't hunting for him—they're after this girl. Any kind of a cellar to this joint?"

"Yes." The river rat had reached for his gun again. "Yes, there's a bit of a dug-out under the floor here."

"Good enough. Miss—Miss Slovak Jack!" he called. "Wrap one o' them there blankets around you and crawl down under the floor here. Don't come out until I tell you. Ain't got time for explanations. Hurry."

Quietly the girl obeyed. The floor closed over her. Flinty McNeall turned to the old man once more.

"Shade to that window?"

"Yes."

"Light one?"

"Yes."

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"Fine and dandy. Pull it down. Then light that lamp!"

"But——"

"Go on. I got a hunch!"

The old man struck a match falteringly. Flinty McNeall hurried to the corner, and bringing forth the old department store dummy, looked at it curiously.

"Guess I'm going to have to put your wife to work," he announced slowly. "Pull out that table so the light'll have space for shadows. That's right."

Then quickly he carried forth the leering, awkward dummy, to bend it and punch it about, grinning to himself the while. The old man watched curiously. Flinty grinned at him.

"What'm I doing?" he asked. "Playin' an old stunt—in new surroundings. That's why I think it's going to work. Get me a chair to brace this thing with. That's right. Now, how's that shadow against the shade? Look like a woman's head and shoulders?"

"Yes—yes, it does."

"Good enough." Flinty McNeall fussed again with the figure which he had bent into a chair. "All right. Hand me that there rifle. Then you get on the floor—and stay there."

And with the action by the river pirate, Flinty McNeall himself went to the floor, to reach upward now and then, that he might move the figure in the chair, first forward, then to the side, jerking it a bit now and then, bending it and straightening it, that its movements might resemble those of a human being. Painstaking work, if work it was, ludicrous in a way, as its stolid eyes stared in the lamplight, its limp arms flopped and swung at its sides, its once painted lips, cracked and colorless now, still held to their cupid's-bow molding.

Ludicrous—yet indicative of suspense, an awkward, leering, baited trap, awaiting the approach of men of death, luring them into the grasp of Flinty McNeall and the old, weather-beaten river rat, who lay on the floor by the door, his sawed-off shotgun cocked and ready, his beady, nervous eyes shifting, his every muscle set for instant action.

LONG they waited, while the cry of the monkey sounded again from the far away, while the night wind rose once more, then dulled; waited patiently, yet nervously, Flinty remaining steadfastly by his task, moving the dummy with a painstaking devotion to detail, waiting, waiting——"

"Listen!"

It was a whispered warning from the old man on the floor. Outside had come the sound of bending brush and fantom bramble. Then, crackling in its intensity, came the report of a revolver, while glass shattered about Flinty McNeall, and the dummy, suddenly propelled by him, jerked to the floor. The lips curled back from Flinty's teeth. With a quick, whirling motion, he slid from beneath the window to the shelter of the door, seizing his rifle as he did so.

"Come on!" he ordered tersely. "They're off their guard! We've got 'em."

Already, the old man was on his feet and at the door. It swung open, to allow two catapulting figures to spring forth and to rush around the corner of the rambling shack. There, outlined against the white of the fantom bramble, two figures were rushing forward.

A shout. The crack of a revolver, then the booming bellow of the sawed-off shotgun. Slovak Jack, in the foreground, whined, raised his arms, whirled in his tracks and fell to the ground. Behind him the Trembler, seeing his companion fall, leaped to the cover of the fantom bramble and crashed through it for escape.

Flinty hesitated only a second.

"That fellow's moving," he shouted to the river rat. "Hang to him. I'll take the other one! I want him—alone!"

Then forward he leaped to the pursuit, taking the trail of the fantom bramble, listening for the crashing sound of the Trembler, following by instinct, the instinct of revenge that had lingered in his heart for more than twenty years, the instinct reborn of that night when a shot from the Trembler's gun had sent Flinty's twin brother to his death.

On and on they went, through the sycamores, through the masses of willows, the course revealed now and then by the spitting fire of the Trembler's revolver as he dodged among the massed vegetation and peeling tree trunks, seeking to double upon his adversary, but vainly. As for Flinty, his rifle remained silent, waiting for the time when it would come in to better advantage, when the one bullet it contained would tell its story in death.

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On and on—once Flinty lost the track, then gained it again. Then suddenly he stopped, set his teeth in a sudden resolve and hesitantly turned in his course, apparently giving up his chase.

But it was only for a moment. Then with a sudden circling motion, Flinty McNeall broke toward the marshes, there to fight his way across them, toward the ridge of higher ground which he knew the Trembler must take to reach the upper end of the island. And the Trembler was seeking flight now. The girl was forgotten apparently—all was forgotten save that he must make his escape, that he must flee the island and the evidence that it held there against him. Flinty knew in his heart that the Trembler was heading for his boat and for the currents of the Missouri. And Flinty strove doggedly to circumvent him.

A long splashing journey. Then a sudden, spurting effort as he neared the shore. The time for action was coming now—if it was to come at all. Flinty pressed his thumb against the hammer of the old rifle and sought to pull it into readiness. An exclamation of anger came from his lips. Again he pulled. But the old hammer was rusted and stuck. It moved for a fraction of an inch — then moved no more.

A sound from the brambles. Then a form as it sneaked along. Flinty fell to the ground, tugging at the hammer of the rifle which now was beginning to yield slightly. But the thumping horror in the heart of the little circus man told him that it was too late. The Trembler had seen him. The Trembler had swerved in his course, seeking the shadows—that he might outline Flinty McNeall in the dull light of fading night, while Flinty tugged at the rasping hammer of the rusty old rifle that seemed destined to cause his own death.

Farther and farther crept the form of the Trembler—then it stopped. Carefully, slowly, Flinty could see the arm raising, as Flinty pulled with his last ounce of strength at the hammer. It yielded, the rust suddenly loosening. The hammer glided into position and clicked there. But out before him, the Trembler's hand had steadied in its final aim—while Flinty McNeall was just getting the rifle to his shoulder.

A horrible instant. Then a crackle of flame. But not from the revolver of the Trembler. For there, his arm extending into the air where the spasmodic action had caused him to drop the revolver just as the finger had begun to press the trigger, there, waving drunkenly as he sought to hold his footing, was the Trembler, struck by the bullet from Flinty's rifle, making his last fight for breath, sagging—sagging.

But still the spasmodic hand climbed upward. Still it shook and trembled. Still its fingers clutched and hooked their clawlike forms in the air, in a last palsied, trembling menace—then, like the sodden, lifeless thing he had become, the Trembler crumpled to the ground, dead.

Flinty McNeall lingered only a moment—only long enough to assure himself that his enemy was gone forever. Then hurriedly he ran for the shack again, where the old river rat had dragged the gasping form of Slovak Jack to the bunk, and where the girl of the circus train had come from her protection beneath the floor that she might administer to the being she once had called her father.

A quick glance told Flinty McNeall that the wound was mortal. The death glaze was beginning to find its way into his eyes. The gasping breath was growing shorter and more painful. Flinty hurried to his side.

"You're goin', Jack," he announced shortly. "There ain't no time for foolin'. The game's over. You'd better confess—and die clean."

The agonized eyes of the man moved dully from side to side. They seemed to be searching for something they could not see. Flinty divined the gaze.

"You're lookin' for your boss — the Trembler. There ain't no use. He's gone."

"Gone?" The word came raspingly from the blood-stained lips of the lumberjack.

"Dead," supplemented Flinty. "So——"

"Dead," echoed Slovak Jack. "Dead—then I—I——"

His lips sought to frame a sentence. A whispering gasping sound passed over them. He motioned feebly toward the girl, standing wild-eyed at his side. Then with the words unspoken, the lips quieted. Slovak Jack had followed his master in death. The confession had not come.

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XV

IT was three hours later that Flinty McNeall and the river rat stood in the offices of Billy Griffin, chief of Kansas City police. Mort Scott was there also, hurriedly summoned from his bed to start toward Ghost Island with the police that he might reclaim his gorilla while the police took charge of all that remained of The Trembler and Slovak Jack. A patrolman entered.

"Miss Darling's just been brought down from her home," he announced.

"Good," the chief turned at his desk. "Scott, you clear out of here. Flinty, guess you and your friend had better stay and hear what she's got to say. There's a good deal about this thing that hasn't been explained."

"A whale of a lot," answered Flinty, whole-heartedly, rubbing his sleepy eyes. "The girl went to sleep on me coming down in the Trembler's boat and I didn't have the heart to wake her up. She was all in. You're going to send for her too, aren't you?"

"Certainly. Barstow," he ordered of the waiting patrolman, "send that girl down from the matron's room—the one this gentleman brought in from Ghost Island. Then get Miss Darling. Anybody come down with her?"

"Yes, sir. There was an old man who said he was a butler at the house. Insisted on bringing a bundle of stuff down with him. Then there was another young fellow who said he could explain himself to you. Seems him and the butler have been sitting up together."

Flinty turned from the window where he had been watching the early morning activities of Main Street.

"That's Big Whitey, my valet," he explained. "He's all right. Let him come in with the rest of the gang."

Ten minutes later, a tall, dark-haired young woman sneered superciliously across the table into the fatigued face of the girl of the circus train.

"Well," she began, "I see they've gotten you at last!"

The girl smiled slightly.

"Yes—and you."

"I?" The young woman drew herself up haughtily. "I like that language. If you gentlemen please, I resent this kind of speech from this prisoner. She——"

"Well, can y' beat that?" Flinty McNeall almost gasped in his astonishment. "As if you wasn't one, too!"

"I—a prisoner? Who said so? I came to this station to identify a girl who had stolen valuables from me and tried to put herself in my place. That's all. If you gentlemen will remember, my father was killed last night—and I am in no condition to be interrogated further than as to the mere identification of this girl. I——"

"Yeh." Flinty McNeall smiled with a corner of his lips, "yeh, that's right. Your father was killed. But his name wasn't Darling."

"Not Darling? Just what do you mean?"

"I mean that his name was Slovak Jack—and that his two partners went with him. The constable from Channelville and George Jordan, alias the Trembler. But, of course, you didn't know them!"

The set expression with which the young woman from the Darling home had masked her features from the beginning only became the harder, the more firm.

"Impossible. I received a letter from Slovak Jack yesterday. He's at home in Midcurrent."

"You told me he couldn't write."

"He can make his mark. Other people can write letters for him—can't they?"

"And you got a letter from Midcurrent yesterday—from Slovak Jack?"

"That is what I said."

"Then where's the letter?" Flinty McNeall banged a fist on the table. "Let's see what it looks like."

"I usually destroy my letters," came the cold answer. "I didn't suppose that I was to be called from the side of my dead father to answer the lying accusations of a person like this." She pointed to the girl, half cowering at the table. "I believed that when a person was a criminal, they were the one to be punished and not——"

"That's enough!" The girl at the table had risen. Into her cheeks a spot of dull crimson was creeping, into her eyes a gleam that sparkled like chipping emery. "That's enough—do you hear me? You've had your say—I'm going to have mine. I've lied, have I? You still say that you're Mary Darling? You still say that, do you?"

"I——"

"Then I'll tell the truth for you! You're Slovak Jack's daughter, bred in the blood

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and bred in the bone. You're the woman that tried to take my birthright away from me. You're the woman that Slovak Jack trained from childhood to take my place, so that you and he could share the money when the Trembler got out of prison and you could get rid of me!

"You didn't think I was listening, did you, the night before I ran away? You didn't think I heard what the Trembler had to say when you and he and Slovak Jack were in the kitchen and I was supposed to have been on my way over to the lumber-camp? But I heard you—" her hands half clawed as she restrained a desire to leap at the sneering, snarling woman before her—"I heard every word that the three of you said. I heard the Trembler tell it all over again, about getting me on the life-boat, and bringing me to Slovak Jack. And I heard him say, too, that there might be trouble if there ever was a comparison of you with the photograph of Mrs. Darling.

"Do you remember hearing him say that? Do you? And do you remember hearing him say that I was the image of the woman who gave him her baby on the life-raft? Well," and the sparkling light in her eyes gleamed brighter than ever, "why don't you suggest that we make a test—there must be some photographs of Mrs. Darling somewhere. I'm ready—are you?"

Over against the wall, the aged old butler, staring wide-eyed and open-mouthed, started forward. Flinty waved him back.

"Keep your shirt on, kid," he ordered. "Let 'em have it out between 'em. Somebody's just about to get a lot off their chest!"

But the woman from the Darling mansion had turned to Chief Griffin with a gesture of appeal.

"If you please," she begged, "I am very tired. As I told you before, my father was killed last night and ——"

"And I," came the biting voice of the girl at the table, "charge that you are the one who was mainly guilty of his murder!"

"What's that?"

Chief Griffin had half risen from his chair. The woman from the Darling mansion paled and turned away. Then she faced her accuser again with a sudden outburst of vituperation. The chief raised his hand.

"That's enough." Then, turning to the girl, "You've made a serious charge."

"AND I'LL continue making it. I charge," and she rapped the table in staccato emphasis of her words, "that this woman is the real daughter of Slovak Jack of Midcurrent, Oregon. I charge that she, with Slovak Jack and a man called the Trembler who took me from my mother's arms when I was a baby, turned me over to Slovak Jack, then returned for me as soon as he had escaped from prison, conspired to ruin my life by taking my place as the real, lawful daughter of James Darling, while I was held a prisoner on Ghost Island.

"I charge that I was taken to jail in Channelville, Oregon, by a man who was the constable of the town and who now lies dead on Ghost Island, where he was killed last night by a gorilla, that I was kept in a semi-conscious condition and brought to Ghost Island.

"I charge that this woman came over there and offered me five thousand dollars if I would sign a confession saying that I was the real daughter of Slovak Jack, and to serve a short sentence as the thief of jewels that were rightfully mine."

"As if any one would believe that story——"

"Will you please keep quiet?" The voice of the chief was exceedingly curt. "Go on, young lady. What's the rest of it? How about Mr. Darling's death?"

"I'll tell it. Slovak Jack was there. So was this woman. So was the Trembler—I had gotten his name by then—and so was the constable. They beat me. They threatened me. They raised the offer from five thousand dollars to fifty thousand dollars. Then when I refused, they—they—dug a grave, and took me out every day and showed it to me. They said it was for me if—if I wouldn't do as they said. They——"

Her hands covered her face in a sudden fit of sobbing. Again the woman of the Darling mansion turned to the chief.

"You can't believe such stuff as ——"

"The grave's right up on Ghost Island. I saw it," broke in Flinty McNeall.

Chief Griffin moved closer to the girl at the table.

"Go on with your story," he ordered.

The girl removed her hands from her eyes.

"Then they decided that there was only one thing to do. This woman must be put

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in immediate possession of the money, clear up the estate as soon as she could and divide it with the three men. I was to be killed—oh—" she added with a sudden outburst of emotion—"they didn't forget to remind me of that!

"I tried to escape. I got out of the little building where they had me, and roamed the island. But it was useless. I could find no one—nothing. They caught me again and brought me back. I didn't try to escape again. I knew they'd get me—and beat me.

"Then one night this woman came to the island with the gorilla. They brought it up in the big boat and made a cage for it, so that they could handle it when she was away. It would do anything for her. It seemed to like me, too—I heard the Trembler say to Slovak Jack that he had seen women in the show where it had been even jab it with their umbrellas without it becoming angry at them. But it hated the men. That's why they had the cage. I wondered what they were going to do with it.

"Then this woman began coming there every night. She began rehearsing it in something. I could hear her say: 'Grab that man! Hit him, hear me, hit him! Now, grab him and shake him! Grab him——' "

"I won't listen to this! I won't—" the woman from the Darling mansion stepped forward, white-faced and seething. "It's all a lie, a——"

"It's a darned good one if it is!" cut in Flinty McNeall. "Suppose you keep your trap shut for a minute!"

"What then?" asked the chief.

The girl at the table rubbed her hands nervously.

"Every night they practised with the gorilla. I could hear it howling and screeching for hours."

"So could I," said the river rat from a corner of the room. "That dinged varmint kept me awake——"

"Nix. Let her go on with the story," Flinty ordered. "Then what?"

"Then last night they took it away. It was early in the evening. When they came back, they were all mad. I heard this woman quarreling with the Trembler and telling him that it wasn't her fault that she had to bring the gorilla back.

" 'What could I do?' she asked him. 'I started to run for the automobile as soon as he had knocked the old man down and I was sure he'd made footprints around the body. I thought the gorilla would stay there. But he followed me, and jumped into the machine with me and clung to me, whimpering all the way down to the boat. Why didn't you drive him off when we got down there? You had as much chance as I did!' "

"Do you know it was this woman?" Chief Griffin put the question.

"They were in the next room to me."

"And after that?"

"She insisted that they take her home right away. From what I heard, I knew that they had killed some one by making the gorilla jump out at him and hit him and shake him as they had trained it to do—and I knew in my heart it was Mr. Darling. She kept saying that she must be home in time to receive the notification of his death, and she was angry and mad because she had been forced to bring the gorilla back to the island.

"They had figured on letting it run loose after the killing, so it would be caught and the whole thing settled up quickly. They never counted on the gorilla jumping in the machine with her after the killing. And she was the one who handled the whole thing—" again the girl at the table pointed accusingly at the woman from the Darling mansion—"she's the one! It was the Trembler's idea, but she carried it out—and she knows she did!"

"I know nothing whatever about it. I——"

"We'll settle that soon," said the chief calmly. "What happened next?"

"They put the gorilla in its cage. Then they took this woman back to the city. When they came to the island, they were excited. They'd had a fight with some one in the river, and the Trembler was cursing and shouting that everything had gone wrong.

"He said something about 'finishing that girl in there the same way the old man was handled,' and went into the next room where the gorilla was.

"The constable went with him. They started to get the gorilla out of its cage. It resisted—I could hear it howling and objecting. Then suddenly, the whole place echoed with its screams. It crashed about the room, screeching and yelling like a thing insane. I heard the constable—I think his

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real name was Young; the 'Weasel,' they called him sometimes——"

The chief nodded his head quickly.

"Baldwin Young. Alias the Weasel. Philadelphia yeggman. Disappeared about five years ago. Go on."

"I heard him scream for help, then saw the Trembler run from the room. The next thing I knew, the bleeding form of the constable hurtled through the door and fell to the floor, still and dead, while the gorilla leaped over his form, broke out the opposite door, and ran out into the storm. I was too frightened to know much what I was doing. I ran out too—stumbling along through the darkness until I came to the mound of the grave that had been dug for me. It frightened me worse than ever. I —I ran then until I fell, exhausted. The next thing I knew, Mr. McNeall had taken me into a cabin, with this other gentleman, here."

THERE WAS a long silence. Then the woman who had called herself Miss Darling bent across the table, her lips livid, the lines of her face drawn and snarling.

"So that's your story? I tell you it's a lie, every bit of it a lie!"

"That'll be easy to settle," Flinty McNeall interrupted. "The island holds the evidence."

"And I suppose it holds the evidence, too, that she's the real Mary Darling," came sneeringly. "I suppose——"

"If your Honor please—" it was the old butler who had risen, dragging his bundle with him, and bowing slowly to the chief of police—"I believe I can aid in that extremity. I believe, sir, also, I was the first one to suspicion this young woman here, and paid a visit to Mr. McNeall regarding that very same thing last night. I have pictures here, sir, of the late Mrs. Darling, taken when she was within a few years of my young mistress, here. If you will remember," he nodded toward Flinty McNeall, "I told you last night that Mrs. Darling was much younger than her husband."

He turned, and bowed to the girl at the table, meanwhile opening the package and bringing forth a photograph.

"I think you'll find them nearly alike in face, in feature, in form and in hair. Here, sir, is one taken at eighteen. Another at twenty. You'll see, they could be twins, sir."

There was a quick comparison of picture and of human. Flinty McNeall looked, then grinned with a happiness he had not known in weeks. But the old butler still was bringing forth photographs.

"And here, sir," he announced as he handled a picture of a woman's hand, "is a rather queer little angle of the matter. As I explained to Mr. McNeall last night, Mrs. Darling had a very pretty, quite pretty, sir, but rather peculiar formation of the veins on the back of her hand. Now if the young lady will only hold forth her hand so that we can compare——"

Out of the past, a photograph showed the likeness of a pretty, well-shaped hand, with its tiny, smoothly formed veins, running in such even lines that it seemed impossible that Nature could have built an arterial system, so beautifully alined. And beside the picture lay a human hand, with the same alinement, the same smoothness, the same marking! The chief leaned back in his chair.

"I believe I have a few things to say to this young woman who has been occupying the place of Mr. Darling's daughter," he announced. "I'd like to say them alone."

IT WAS two hours later that Chief Griffin walked forth from his office to find Flinty McNeall awaiting him in the ante-room. Across the way, curled in a big chair, was the little girl of Ghost Island, who had just finished a telling and retelling of her story to the eager-eared police reporters, and who already was dozing from the fatigue of the night. Chief Griffin looked at her, then turned to Flinty McNeall with a smile.

"If you'll awaken her—" he suggested.

"Certainly." Flinty crossed the room and laid a hand on her shoulder. "The Chief wants to see you, miss."

She looked up and smiled apologetically. The chief came forward.

"I simply wanted to tell you that the young woman inside has decided to tell the truth. She has signed the confession that makes you Miss Mary Darling. We are wiring to Midcurrent now to learn just how those affidavits were falsified and who, if any one, was guilty. Of course, Slovak Jack could have attended to that, you know —the mere transference of names from

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childhood would have done it. However, that's beside the point." He reached forth and took her hand. "I want to be the first to call you by your real name—and to offer my congratulations."

"Gosh!" It was Flinty McNeall brushing him aside. "If there's goin' to be any 'first' about this, I'm going to be it. Now, ain't that right, Miss Darling?"

"Why not together?" she asked with a laugh, and extended her hands.

"She's righter'n a fox, Chief," said Flinty. "But me for the right hand."

A moment later, the door closed behind the chief as he re-entered his office. As for Flinty McNeall, he still clasped the hand of Mary Darling, grinning happily, almost boyishly at her.

"Well," he announced at last, "you've got a regular, honest t' goodness name now, ain't you, Miss Darling?"

"Yes—thanks to you."

"Me?"

"Why, of course, Mr. McNeall."

"Mr. what?"

"McNeall."

Flinty scraped a foot on the floor.

"People that like me usually call me Flinty," he volunteered.

Mary Darling laughed.

"All right—Flinty."

There was a long pause, and then—

"That's a swell joint you're going to up there—that house."

"Yes?"

"Yeh. I've been in it. Y'know, I'm worth a million and all that, but all my life I've wanted to know somebody who lived in a joint like that, somebody I could—I could——"

"What?"

"Well, I could give up the circus business for and all that sort of thing, and stall around and act foolish about and—call her Mary, darling, and——"

"Mary Darling?"

"Yeh, with the accent on the darling. And—some time when I got up courage enough, maybe ask her to run the Flinty McNeall fortune for the rest of her life, and tell her poor nut of a husband where to get off at and when to wear his overcoat and not to come into the house without scraping his shoes and——"

"Do you mean——"

Flinty grinned.

"Uh-huh."

"But—isn't this short notice?"

"Sudden, you mean?"

"Well—yes."

"Sure it is. I'm a sudden guy. But—" apologetically—"you know, you don't have to kick in with an answer until you get ready to."

Again there was silence. With her one free hand, Mary Darling marked a name on the table, then quickly erased it. Then a sudden seriousness swept across her features.

"But, Flinty—is this just the time to think—of that? The man I owe my name to is——"

"Don't say it." Flinty McNeall raised a hand quickly. "There's enough troubles in the world, waiting for us t' face 'em, without us hunting for 'em before they're ready t' be faced. And right now—we've got our own little world t' consider for just the minute. And I'm asking you, if you'll play futures with me, if you'll just let me hang around in the background until the time when you're sure you can say to me: 'Flinty, I'm thinking I'm lonely without you. I'm thinking I'd like to trade names, and be Mrs. McNeall!' Won't you let me do that? Won't you play futures with me?"

"But," she smiled, "I've just gotten a new name. And the minute you help me to become Mary Darling, you ask me to become something else."

"Ah," and the Irish in Flinty came to the surface for just a second, "you'd always be Mary Darling to me!"

There was a concerted little laugh—which trailed into low tones, which trailed in turn to whispers. And Flinty McNeall still held the hand of his Mary Darling.

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TWO CALLS IN THE JUNGLE

By Clyde B Hough

Author of "Darcy Deserts," and "The Call of the Jungle."

IT WAS a human cry, charged with terror. It came, faint, from a long way off and seemed to have been stifled—choked off—before it was completed.

"Smoke" crouched low and crept forward. He could have gone back to the company of white troops, to which he was temporarily attached, and their captain would have sent a squad of men to investigate. But Smoke was only a few generations removed from the African jungle-man and from him he had the instinct for lone-handed battles. Perhaps this instinct is born of vainglory, perhaps of the primeval urge to achieve, to excel. At any rate, in the final analysis, it amounts to personal courage.

Smoke crept on. Through the coconut grove, across bamboo-set swamps and on over great, tangled masses of vines, he moved with the stealth of a jungle cat. And though he was a heavy man, never a twig did he break and never a sound did he make.

For half an hour Smoke scouted, peering through clumps of bamboo, over boulders and even into the fronded palms and always did he listen, intently, for a repetition of that dreadful cry. But the cry was not repeated, though after a while, he heard a low babble of voices well to the right of him. And he knew, by the strange words, that they were natives who spoke. He changed his direction toward the voices and moved with even greater caution than before.

Then when the sounds became plainer he lay flat on his stomach and wormed his way forward, painfully, inch by inch, moving with his hands each twig or dead branch that lay in his path. At last he came to the bank of a ravine and the voices told him that the natives were there—at the bottom. Lying flat at the top of the bank he thrust his face, cautiously, between the branches of a small bush and looked down.

What he saw was a large ant-hill, more than the length of a man in breadth. Across the ant-hill was a white man, naked, face up, spread-eagled, and gagged; around him a circle of natives. They were watching the ants raise red welts on tender, white flesh and jesting in fiendish glee at the sight.

The tortured man's muscles writhed like separate bodies and strained against the skin as if their owner's brain were trying to cry out through them. Smoke watched this display of agony, his brain paralyzed, for the moment unable to perform.

At this juncture, the white man, rolling his head from side to side, sighted the face

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on the bank above him. There was a great scar across the profile of the face on the bank, a scar that once seen would never be forgotten. The white man had seen that scar before and he remembered it, even now, in his present agony. His eyes flashed the recognition thought that was in his brain. Smoke saw this flash and understood it; and it caused him to scan the face below him, more closely. Then he, in turn, recognized the other.

The scar across Smoke's face became a white welt on the black skin, his mouth set and his hands clenched. He, too, remembered, and it was not a pleasant memory. Recollection sent his mind back, in one bound, to a day on a certain street in Macon, Georgia, more than five years ago.

FOR a few moments Smoke stood apart from himself, as it were, and viewed that five-year block out of his life as one views a motion picture. He saw himself, walking, with a slouching, slap-footed gait along the edge of a sidewalk.

This was in Macon. Coming toward him, his face flushed, his hat on the back of his head, and his eyes a little glazed, was a white man. This was Milton Carter.

"Hey there, Sambo," said Carter, "get off the sidewalk and take off your hat when you see me coming."

Sambo did not move. He did not know then, and even now, evolutionized to a smart, disciplined soldier, Smoke who had been Sambo, did not know why he, Sambo, had defied Milton Carter, the white man. He knew only that he resented this unmerited hectoring, and to stand still, not to obey, was his protest; the only protest he dared to make.

Milton Carter drew a large jackknife, stepped quickly up to Sambo and slashed the side of his face from cheek-bone to chin. Then with a terrific kick, he sent Sambo to the gutter, spat in his face, laughed and went on.

Sambo regained his breath, scrambled to his feet, and went home to his black mother, who tended his wound.

Came the day when Sambo's face was well and he walked again in the streets of Macon and hoped that he would meet Milton Carter. For there was another wound deep in him and it cried out for reparation. Sambo did not know what he would do when he did meet Carter, he had no plan, but he knew in a dim way that somehow he would redeem himself in the eyes of himself. Many times he walked the streets, hoping to meet Carter, at the same time trembling and fearful at the prospect.

Then one day the inevitable occurred. Sambo was slouching along near the edge of a sidewalk and Milton Carter was coming toward him. Carter was again flushed, he had just come out of a saloon in the middle of the block. Now they were within two steps of each other.

"Sambo," said Carter, "what did I slash your face for not a month ago?"

Sambo stopped, stood sullen, but did not speak. His knees shook, his body was afraid, his legs wanted to run away, his hand wanted to reach up, take off his hat and save his body physical suffering. But he did none of these things. There was something in him that was greater than his body, that held him there, waiting blindly, uncomprehending, for the chance to redeem himself in the eyes of himself.

Milton Carter drew back his fist and as he did so, Sambo, without realizing what he did, without knowing one second before that he was going to act, swung his ponderous fist in a sledgehammer blow—it landed. The white man would as soon have expected the earth to open and swallow him. He was unprepared. He fell like an ox.

For Sambo, panic, frenzy, terror. He heard already, the low, throaty growl of the mob and already he felt the rope tighten about his neck. He had committed the unpardonable sin. He had struck a white man, and his brain told his legs to take him away.

There were nights in swamps; fever-ridden nights, and mosquito-tortured. Then days of hunger in the box cars, and "hand-outs" grudgingly given at back doors, and finally a job at St. Louis. And later—the Army and Cuba, the charge, the steel-clad bullet in his shoulder and afterward, a medal.

Then came the Philippines and the affair at Illigan and the second wound; and his regiment, the colored regiment, had gone on while he was yet unable to leave the hospital. Then, well at last, he had been attached to a white regiment till such time as he could reach his own. The white

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regiment had camped for a day's rest and wash-up near the coconut grove where Smoke had been drinking luscious, green coconut milk when he heard the cry. Thus the past merged into the present.

The white man stretched and staked on the ant-hill below was Milton Carter. And it was given Smoke to watch the ants saw Milton Carter's body to infinitesimal bits and haul it away to their storerooms. What greater revenge could he ask? None. For a few minutes his nerves tingled and his mind hugged its gratification.

Then there stirred in him another emotion. This emotion was not native, primeval, like the first; it was one engendered, the spirit of camaraderie bred of years in the service. Now, Sambo, in all probability had never heard the word camaraderie, but he had heard often its equivalent. A phrase in the service which runs—

"It's all under the flag."

That was it. It was all under the flag. He was under the flag and Carter was under the flag. They were both sworn servants of Old Glory and those brown devils down there were enemies.

The muscles in Smoke's thick neck swelled and the button at his shirt collar popped off. His heavy shoulders, those shoulders that were the pride of his company, hunched forward and he went down the bank. No, he did not go down; he did not climb down. He landed amidst the circle and it was as if an avalanche had landed. His bayonet and butt worked alternately with the speed and power of a trip-hammer. The Filipinos were bewildered, awed, terrorized. They thoroughly believed that a god had dropped from the sky to wreak vengeance on them, and those who were able speedily took to their heels.

Smoke loosened the stakes and ropes that held the now unconscious Carter, threw him across his shoulder and went up the bank with the ease of a gorilla.

SMELLS

BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

WERE you to drop me blindfold in places I have been,
I'd name them by their smell alone, as miners gold from tin.
The smoky smell of London's not the sour smell of Cork
Nor the stony, gasoleney smell of traffic-jammed New York.

In Bermuda it is whitewash mixed with cedar, sage and brine;
In Lakewood it is essence of concentrated pine;
In Paris it is pungent whiffs from boulevards of wood
Spiced with garden-truck, *vin ordinaire* and cooking that is good.

It is limes in Dominica plus coco, filth and musk;
At New Orleans, that river smell, especially at dusk;
At Gloucester it is codfish, though the fleet is on the Bank;
In Chicago, of the stockyards, all that's butchered, dead and rank.

Not only are there different smells for every different place,
But different ones for different trades and every different race.
And what's the need of manifests to know a steamer's freight
When her cargo's sugar, rubber, wool or onions by the crate?

So I relive adventures, am whiffed from here to there,
Say, Liverpool to Canton, Saigon to Saint-Nazaire,
Wafted by rich aromas or a savor or a stench
From chop-sueys or chop-houses or a café really French.

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MONTE CRISTO II

By J Allan Dunn

Author of "The Ferret and the Bet," "Pearls of Great Price," etc.

JIM GEDNEY was girl-shy. Generally, so far as his own sex was concerned, he was neither altogether dumb nor especially awkward, but let a girl loom on the horizon and Jim was promptly tongue-tied, handcuffed and hobbled, to say nothing of the irrepressible, irresistible flush that mounted until his freckles were submerged in the crimson flood of embarrassment that joined the pompadour of red hair.

He hated it and he fought against it but seemingly he could no more conquer it than you can stop your mouth watering when some one hands you a ripe apple. It shut him out from much amusement that he craved, it divided the limits of his life—of that part of it that did not belong to the express company for which he worked—squarely in half, denying him the half he wanted.

Mentally Jimmy was a ladies' man, in his imagination and his dreams he saw himself gay and debonair, glib of small talk and light jest, a coveted partner in the dance, a favored squire of dames. In real life—he was a scream for help.

He looked over at the counter where a pretty girl was asking "Fat" Simpson about a package. Fat was no Adonis but he had said something to make the girl laugh and Jim caught words that told him Fat was kidding her about a picnic announced for next Sunday. And, yes, darned if she wasn't telling Fat she'd go with him. A pretty girl like that along with Fat!

Jim's imagination leaped ahead. He could see himself turning up at the picnic immaculately dressed, breezing up to Fat and his lady friend in airy fashion, cutting out poor old Fat, taking all the dances after they had sat next to each other at the luncheon and perhaps swam out together so far beyond the safety line that the rest were alarmed and the life-saver went out after them, only to come back and report:

"Needn't worry about them. That chap's a regular fish."

Then the film of his imagination ended and he recalled the last picnic he had ventured to, coming home alone, the girl he had taken deserting him after two silent, torturing hours, overheard references to a "dub," merry, slighting glances, the loud yell of the life-saver:

"Whatcher tryin' ter do? Commit suicide? Keep back of that rope ef you can't swim, you bonehead!"

There were other memories stretching across the years: torn flounces, angry glances from the owners of crushed feet, spilled dishes in feminine laps, walks where

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his soul had striven to break through the bars of silence while he felt the contempt of the girl he escorted looking at him from under her lashes.

"Some dame, Jimmy!" Fat had slapped him on the back. "That's the way to cop 'em out. Jolly 'em and they all fall. Better get you a skirt, Jimmy, and come along, you old mossback!"

"Wish I could," said Jim, devoutly, "but I can't make it."

He tried to figure out why he was, no use mincing the word, such a dub. He'd never had a square deal like the other chaps had. His father had been a mining man, seldom at home, looking for the luck that always eluded him. His mother, a good-looking woman, always complaining about the lack of funds, had never had much use for him, he fancied. Finally, when the "old man" got blown up in a premature blast, Jimmy—he was only twelve, but he remembered wondering at the words—heard her say to a man who was always hanging around—

"Thank God for that, now we can get married."

And they had. And Jimmy had not been included in either the ceremony, the wedding trip, or any of the subsequent proceedings of bride and groom. He had been boarded out until his stepfather grew tired of paying the bills, inside of a year, and Jimmy perforce had found a job.

Once in it he had stuck to it. From odd boy he had climbed until now he was a full-fledged clerk of the express company. From three dollars a week he had mounted to sixteen. Ten of this kept him fairly well, almost all of the rest he spent in books. His room was full of them. He was a known "live prospect" to every pedler of standard works in "leather, cloth and paper."

He read about the secrets of the favorites of kings, he had three encyclopedias in so many volumes apiece, his authors ranged the whole gamut of history and fiction from Thackeray to O. Henry. He had books on etiquette, on the art of being just what he craved to be. One advertisement had pictured the tortures of a young man at an evening party and Jimmy had promptly sent for that work but somehow the long-distance or correspondence methods did not work out with him.

The books did one thing for him. They helped to fill the hours when less bashful fellows were out having a good time with the girls that Jimmy longed, yet feared, to meet. And he had his favorite heroes who were never at a loss for the right thing to say or do. He read those stories over many times.

And now he believed—he hoped so hard that he had to believe—he had found the solution. It was not an easy one to apply. He had figured it out in dollars and cents and he didn't see how he could ever get a chance to try it out but he felt it was right.

"I've got to get away from this dump first of all," he told himself. "Been here all my life and I'm a joke with the girls. They expect me to step on my own foot or on theirs and I do it. They giggle when they see me coming. They've got me buffaloed before I start. They don't ask me in on anything except something where my coin is needed so there won't be a loss, and then I'm a bus-boy to the outfit. A new place and a fine outfit, with a bunch of kale and I bet I could travel with the rest of the crowd and hold up my end."

Two volumes had brought this hint of solace to Jimmy. One was "The Count of Monte Cristo." Here was an ignorant peasant transformed into a man of the world, talking familiarly with financiers and generals, women at his feet, a beautiful slave, jewels, skewering or otherwise demolishing those who had persecuted him, a come-back of the first water carrying a million francs in his vest pocket. Some hero!

Jimmy could see himself turning up, polished beyond all recognition, thousand-dollar bills tucked away all over him, the girls all rushing him, distributing disdain on those who had made a mock of him. Some stunt! The only trouble was the money. It wasn't every one who could be immured in a dungeon next to a grateful Abbé—whatever that was—get the secret of the hidden hoard, take the place of a dead man in a sack with a weight at one end, get dumped into the sea and get clear. After he had read the book some half a dozen times Jim saw it at the movies. Great stuff! If he could only pull off something like that.

Mind you, this was no joke to Jim. It all hurt. He craved for girls' society like every normal young chap and his embarrassments, his awkward stunts, the comments, the knowledge that he was a dub, went deeper than just below the skin. Jimmy's

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spirit was seared, seared but resolute that somehow, somewhere, he sometime would vindicate himself.

The other book was a bulky volume. It was a mail-order catalog that Jim had sent for. It contained every imaginable thing that Jim could conceive of going into the wardrobe of a man of the world of the twentieth century and his mind's eye saw him outfitted completely, including wardrobe trunks and a combination hat-box.

He had a list made out of what he wanted to get and it was a long one. He picked clothes for every conceivable occasion, for all sports, for all hours, for all seasons. He worked over it, altering and changing and completing until the most favorite and wealthy of all our movie heroes would have been a fourflusher beside Jimmy when it came to clothes—providing Jimmy had them. Of course they were cheaper than if made to order and the price was a staggering one for the total, but they had the infinite advantage of being on tap.

Granted the *Monte Cristo* treasure, he could send the cash and, in a week, there he would be full-fledged, fitted for Montreal or Florida. He would need a valet to take care of them. Jimmy—whose wardrobe consisted of one Winter suit, one Spring and Summer ditto, one extra pair of flannel pants, one faded bathing-suit, a few shirts, two suits of cotton-flannel pajamas, some sketchy underwear and socks, five handkerchiefs, one belt, one pair of suspenders, two pairs of shoes and one pair of sneakers, one cloth cap, one fedora, one cleaned vintage straw, one overcoat for all occasions and a round-top trunk—reveled in the reading of his list.

As he read he would clothe himself, aided by the many engravings. He could see himself dinner-coated in his club, dress-coated at the opera with a girl to whom the girls of Boomville would be as match-flames to an electric chandelier. On the wharf looking at his motorboat, golfing, mackinawed for tobogganning, putteed and tight-kneed and otherwise floppy-breeched for his prancing steed, properly garbed and furred for stepping into his twelve-cylinder. Great! And always girls to hang on his lightest word and action. *Monte Cristo* up-to-date. That was Jimmy.

New place, new outfit, new bank-account! That was all he needed to step right into line. He'd show them.

And then he would count his cash, set aside the price of his laundry, and the vision, for the time, would fade.

Harry Reade, one step up from him in the express office, was the bright particular star that Jimmy yearned to eclipse. Reade was all Jimmy wished he were. Always with a smile and a comeback, humming the latest songs and plunking them on a ukulele, jollying the girls; his bureau—he had the next room to Jimmy at the boarding-house—stacked with kodaks of himself with anywhere from one to half a dozen pretty girls in canoes and hammocks by the sea, in the woods, some of the pictures sentimentally inscribed. Harry was generally known as a "riot" where he, Jimmy, was yclept a dub. Well, some day he'd show Harry.

AND, in a way, he did. For, discussing the merits of a man to send to Aurum, a mining-camp that was beginning to ship large quantities of ore and demanded an express office, the powers that were picked Jimmy instead of Reade for the agency.

"He's steady," said the local manager at Boomville. "He don't fool around and mix his figures up with the dates he has with a girl and he stays home nights and reads. He don't waste half his time kidding and his work is always up."

"Good enough," said the still higher-up. "Call him in."

Jimmy was proud to be made an agent with responsibilities of his own. He had a chance to work up business, he would have to handle considerable shipments from the mines, including payrolls, he would be his own boss and a person of some importance in Aurum, and his salary was increased.

It was a new start. Jimmy shipped his limited wardrobe and his stacks of books to Aurum, arrived and opened his office in the little depot, and sought and found a boarding-house.

There were three girls there, all lively, one particularly pretty. They were in the office of the Golden Hope Mine. Jimmy, introduced as the new express agent, they looked at deferentially. His reticence passed for business reserve and he managed to get through the introductions with a nod and an inarticulate murmur that invoked their curiosity as to

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just what sort of man was inside the shell.

Jimmy made a desperate effort. He dived into the "Manual of Deportment and Culture" and opened the conversational game along the lines prescribed. And the pretty one came back with:

"I guess you're right, Mr. Gedney. I'm not strong on highbrow stuff. Listen, we want to get up a dance for Saturday night. Won't you manage it for us? Get the music and the hall and fix things up generally. Some one's got to do it who won't forget things."

Jimmy wanted to say no, he wanted to say he didn't know what would be wanted, but he did want to go the worst way. And he did—the worst way. He got the hall and the music and he got out some announcements. That was easy. He arranged for supper and then forgot wax for the floor or to fix up a place for the girls to primp in. Those things were supplied at the last minute by the ingenuity of another man.

The pretty girl had promised him the first dance—had given it to him before he had asked for it—and the two other girls at the boarding-house had pouted and so Jimmy had found himself committed to six dances. He two-stepped only and that along lines painfully acquired. As a one-stepper and a fox-trotter he was far from a success.

After the first effort with the first two the third girl dodged him. He lacked the nerve to come back for the second attempts, the ice-cream failed to arrive from Boomville, the pianist got drunk and Jimmy sneaked home, conscious that he was the general goat. The expenses set him back fourteen dollars and the next morning, after breakfast and the attitude of the three girls, Jimmy sought a room elsewhere and ate thereafter at the one lunchroom.

He had had a new tryout and had fizzled. He amended his visions. Wardrobe, money and new environment were not sufficient. *Monte Cristo* must have taken lessons in fencing and dancing and worked like a beaver before he made his comeback. He, Jimmy, would have to do that. Study until he was a "dab" instead of a dub, until he could stroll into a crowded salon with all the airy come-and-get-me-girls manner of a film star. Tutors could teach anything—for money. Then the wardrobe. . . .

But it would take a hidden treasure to pull it all off. Meantime he was an outcast, a joke whenever he went into society, a boob. His foot was perpetually in "it" or standing on the other one, he was denied fun, femininity, frolic, doomed to his books, to a bachelor grouchhood. Already the womenfolk of Aurum looked at him either smilingly or pityingly. One was as bad as the other.

The head bookkeeper of the Golden Hope asked him to help him out with some time-sheets and payrolls and Jimmy eagerly consented. Not so much for the extra money as for the work. He was saving up quite a little. At the end of the year he might be five hundred ahead. But his dreamed-of regeneration called for far more than that. The wardrobe figured nearly three times as much and Jimmy could not bear to cut it down, on paper as it all was. In his room, with his books, Jimmy lived a hero. He fell asleep to vivid dreams of conquest and awakened to know himself a badly patched blowout.

The worst of all was the fact that he had fallen head over heels in love with the pretty girl at the boarding-house. He had visioned himself in love before, usually with the girl crazy about him and he more or less condescending. He had pictured romantic scenes but these had all been second-hand, he had merely placed himself in the position of the hero of some story.

This was different. It was personal. It hit him smack between the eyes for the long count. A smile from her would have been to him like a kind word to a stray dog. He'd have wagged his tail and fetched and carried until his legs wore down to dachshund size. But if she smiled it was at him—not for him.

And he wanted her—so badly that he got bitter. If he only had clothes, and money, plus deportment! He used to trail around to get a glimpse of her and then, one day, she departed East to get married. Jim got more bitter. Some day he'd make a girl suffer for this. Then he'd forgive her and they'd go to Europe. Just give him a chance!

THE chance seemed to open up one night when he sat reading a greasy paper at the lunch counter. He read the item twice and later he bought a copy of the paper and took it home.

It was the story, the police-court story,

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of a man who had taken fifty thousand dollars. He had been suspected, tried and sentenced. But they hadn't found the money and the man had protested his innocence. He had got ten years.

Ten years, mused Jimmy. Two off for good behavior. Eight years at six thousand and better a year. And the fifty thousand waiting for him in a lump when he comes out of prison. If the man wasn't old, say he was my age, twenty-four, he'd be there with a fat stake to start in with. Worth it. They had tried to make him give up the money. If he had, the sentence would have been shorter.

But he would have been a nut to do that. He was wise there. The only foolishness he had shown was in not covering his tracks. But he would emerge from his cell like a butterfly from a dreary chrysalis, like a second *Monte Cristo*. Eight years in the penitentiary! What of it? Probably the guy earned about the same as Jimmy. He might save fifty thousand dollars in a hundred years if he lived that long and his job lasted.

Thus temptation leaped at Jimmy when he was most open to it. He didn't think about the ethics of the case. The facts dazzled him. He slept on them and had radiant dreams. And, because his imagination was always working, almost subconsciously he put himself in such a position. Also, because of his habits, he methodically worked out a scheme whereby a man could cover himself. He had this perfected before he realized that he was the man.

The mines were doing wonderfully. Aurum was growing. So were its pay-rolls. Three of the mines paid off on the same day. The pay-rolls came through Jimmy's care and office. And, because the train got in late, the mines let the cash lie in the express safe overnight. The semi-monthly roll at the Golden Hope was close to twenty thousand dollars. The First Strike averaged sixteen and the Luck-Hole twelve.

Forty-eight thousand dollars! He could get away with it. Even if they caught him, though he was sure his plan was air-tight, it would pay. He would go in Jimmy Gedney and come out *Monte Cristo* the Second! He had never had a square deal. The mines wouldn't miss it much. It wasn't like taking it from an individual. And his plans fascinated him. It was real romance.

He went over and over his scheme. Gradually he got together what he needed, an iron cash-box, some sheet-rubber and oilcloth, another gun, buying them here and there in different towns. It took him three months and the pay-rolls grew. He figured he would have nearer fifty-five than fifty thousand in his safe on a certain night.

He got more work from the bookkeeper of the Golden Hope and tackled it nights in his office at the depot. People got used to seeing him there late. Sometimes he slept there on a cot. Back in Boomville the manager congratulated himself on choosing Gedney.

THE night of the pay-roll's arrival came. Jimmy got the packages, receipted for them and put them in the safe. That was at 9:40, the train was an hour late. A freight or two would come along between then and midnight. Probably they would go on through. At midnight he would turn the trick.

Tucked away out of sight were the cash-box, the rubber sheeting and oilcloth and the second gun. Hidden down by the creek where the brush was thick was an old shovel and a prospector's pick close by a hole he had dug far under a great boulder. It had taken him three weeks to dig that, going off for a walk Sunday afternoons and circling back to dive into the brush by the rock. There was a deep pool below the boulder.

At ten o'clock the bookkeeper of the Golden Hope dropped in to ask Jimmy if he had finished the work in hand.

"Not quite," said Jimmy. "I'm going to finish it tonight. Tomorrow will be time enough, won't it?"

"Plenty. I'll get it when we come down for the pay-roll. Did it come?"

"Yes. You don't want to take it along, do you?"

"What for?"

"There's been a bum or two hanging 'round here lately I don't like the looks of," said Jimmy. There were always hoboes passing through to color this remark. "Some night they are going to try to crack that safe," he went on. "I sleep here nights when there's much on hand."

"Put up a fight, would you?" asked the bookkeeper as Jimmy displayed an automatic, property of the express company.

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The man spoke as if he admired Jimmy's grit.

"They'd know some one was around," said Jimmy. "But I don't mind owning up, I'd rather the train got in earlier and you had the responsibility."

"I don't blame you. I'll be 'round in the morning. Good night."

Jimmy was glad the bookkeeper had showed up. He hadn't figured on it, but to get in the remark about the bums was shrewd. If only one would show up. There had been two in the last week, dumped off up the road by the brakemen.

For Jimmy had planned a hold-up on himself, a sort of double-exposure trick where the film hero plays both the hero and his twin brother the villain.

A freight trundled by a little before eleven. Another came along, halted, and Jimmy heard the conductor clumping along for orders to the station agent's domain, next door to Jimmy's office. This was close to twelve. It stayed, blowing off surplus steam, and Jimmy began to fuss. He wanted his plans to go like clockwork. It was half-past before the freight pulled in. Then the night-trick operator shoved his head into Jimmy's room.

"Ain't you turned in yet?" he asked.

"Going to," said Jimmy. "I'm finishing pay-rolls for Bishop."

"The crew chucked a 'bo' off a mile back," said the operator. "He showed fight, they say. He'll likely be along panhandling you for grub."

"Or you," said Jimmy.

"I'll show him an empty can. Well, good night."

Luck was with him, thought Jimmy. A fighting tramp in evidence! He got out his own supper-pail and started to demolish the contents. He wasn't hungry. But he was cool as he went over his plans. He heard stealthy steps on the platform. That was the hobo, likely. He opened the door to the platform. It was a fine night. In an hour the moon would rise over the foothills.

"Got a bite to spare?"

The light from within showed the hobo, a typical wanderer with a black beard, a bit wild-eyed, a modern Ishmael with law and order against him.

"They dumped me and I lit heavy," said the tramp with a grin. "Got a bite, bo? I'm sure hungry."

"I'm not," said Jimmy. "You can have my grub. There's some coffee left. Here."

He handed out the almost untouched supper.

The man looked at him in surprise.

"You're a prince," he said. "This here is some feast. And pie. Gee, if I only had a flop picked out I'd be set."

Jimmy reflected. He didn't want the hobo to sleep near the depot. If he gave him half a dollar for a bed the man would probably spend it in whisky, but at any rate that would take him to town. He fingered the coin and finally brought it out.

"I'll stake you," he said. "Just for luck. Don't pass word on to the boys. I'm no mark, but you say they bumped you."

The tramp took the coin in palpable astonishment. He had wolfed the food.

"You're some sport," he said. "Good luck to you. So long."

Jimmy watched him slouch off toward town. The operator was busy with a call. He turned back into his office and locked the door. There was only one window and the panes were painted to let in light and stop sight.

Jimmy went to the safe and took out the packages. He took off the coverings and slipped them into his pot-bellied stove, which was glowing, for the nights were chilly in the mountains. Then he neatly wrapped the cash, not stopping to count it first, in the rubber-sheeting and then the oilcloth, securing the whole with heavy rubber-bands. It all fitted neatly into the iron cash-box. This he locked, putting the key in his pocket. He picked up a flash-light and tucked that away in his clothes, then switched off the electric.

By the window he inched up the lower sash. It worked without a sound. He had seen to that. With the box under his coat he stood on the platform away from the rails. The stars glittered but the frosty night was quiet as he sat on the edge of the platform and reached the ground silently, lost in the shadow.

Ten minutes later he was by the big rock. A branch cracked suddenly higher up the hill, sounding like a clap of thunder. He squatted with his heart thumping. Then there came a scuttle through the brush and he breathed more freely.

"Rabbit," he muttered.

It had bolted almost between his legs and he glimpsed the white scut of its tail.

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Then he dived into the bushes. Very cautiously he sprayed the base of the rock with his flashlight, thrusting the box far under the stone, and the key under a separate, much smaller stone nearby. He had working-gloves on and, with these to protect him and keep his hands clean, he scooped back the earth over his trove and patted it firmly but quietly with his spade after he had planted several roots of ferns brought beforehand for the purpose.

A flash of the electric torch satisfied him. All about was thick thicket. Whether the ferns lived or died they would camouflage the hole successfully and he had been careful about entering the thicket. Next he slid spade and pick softly into the deep pool, put a heavy stone inside the palm of either glove, buttoned them and sent them without a splash to join the tools. The first half of the job was done and done well.

Ten minutes more and he was back in the office. He switched on the electric again. The safe was ajar and he opened it wide. On a chair by it he piled the books and files he was accustomed to put away each night. Some of them he set on the floor in haphazard fashion. He set another chair handy and dipped his pen in the ink. That was a little detail but it might be noticed and he was going to work swiftly. He had to. The window was still open. He peeped in the stove. The wrappings were consumed.

Half an hour yet before moonrise, he figured. He laid his regulation automatic handy and brought out the other pistol. The automatic was a 38-50, the revolver caliber .32. He picked up a cloth he used for wiping his pen and carefully wrapped it 'round the butt of the revolver.

He was pale but determined.

"—— you, no!" he suddenly shouted after he had taken off his coat and vest, collar and tie and shoes, hanging the clothes on the chair and setting the shoes beside his cot.

He yelled the words and immediately fired his automatic point blank at the window, smashing a pane of glass. Simultaneously he kicked over the chair, picked up the revolver, aimed at his left shoulder and pulled the trigger.

As he did so there came a banging at the door from the night operator.

Then his plans went awry. He had meant to wound himself and toss the revolver, supposedly the weapon of the hold-up, far through the window. He started to throw it but the bullet had smashed the bone and faintness seized him in the pit of his stomach, surged through him, invaded his brain and he fell in a swoon to the floor.

When he came to, the night operator was in the room and so were half a dozen men, including the town marshal. The latter held a flask to his lips. His mouth was full of the strong whisky and he sputtered as he tried to sit up.

"Keep still a bit," said the marshal. "Take it easy."

As he revived he felt something prodding him between his shoulder blades. Involuntarily he shrugged and his wound, which had been bound up, stung. Then it burned intolerably and things got wabbly. They gave him another drink and presently he felt better and they helped him to a chair where he tried to get a grip on himself and his story.

"That's better," said the marshal. "We'll go into town soon as the car shows up. Feel like talking? Or would you rather not? You don't have to."

Jimmy thought he caught an odd inflection in the marshal's voice. Perhaps they suspected him. He expected that.

"Tom Benton tried to get in through the door but it was locked, so he clumb through the open window and saw you on the floor," went on the official. "Then he 'phoned to me. Says he heard you call out. What was it? A hold-up?"

Jimmy pulled himself together and told his story the way he had arranged it. He told it well. He had partly undressed for the night and was going to put on an old dressing-gown he kept at the depot before he put the books away in the safe. He had been working late on the Golden Hope time-sheets. He had his back to the window when he felt a draft and turned 'round to see a man with a dark cloth over his face, just inside the room, holding a gun on him.

"He had the drop on me," said Jimmy, "and he said 'You put your hooks up and keep 'em up! Back up to the desk! Don't you let a peep out of you or I'll plug you for spoiling the trick.'"

"You seem to remember all he said pretty well," said the marshal. "Them his exact words?"

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"Yes," said Jimmy. "That's about what he said."

He had gone over them so often in his plans that he had run them off glibly. He wondered if he had been too glib. He would have to be careful.

"I backed to the desk," he went on. "My own gun was there under some papers. The man didn't know that and I figured I might get him off guard and grab it. He seemed to know what he was about. There was a tramp along here earlier and I gave him what was left of my supper. I figure he was one of a gang and came on to get the lay of things."

"The train-crew chucked a tramp off," said Denton eagerly. "I told Jimmy about it earlier."

"Go on," said the marshal to Jimmy. "Did you get the gun?"

"The man went to the safe and told me to tell him where the money packages were. I wouldn't because I figured he'd have to turn his head. But he kept looking back and forth at me and the safe so quick I didn't get a chance. He locates the money and sticks it in his pocket. Then he went to the window. 'Don't you move for five minutes,' he says. Just as he was going through his clothes caught on a nail——"

One of the men moved over to the window and felt the sash.

"Here's the nail," he said. "No cloth on it."

"It took his attention," said Jimmy. "and I grabbed for my gun and shouted at him. I guess we both fired together and I went down."

"He was at the window when he fired and you at the desk?"

"Yes."

"Sure of that?"

Jimmy nodded. He had made up his mind to tell the story he had so often rehearsed and stick to it. No third degree was going to shake him.

"Then," said the marshal, and his eyes suddenly grew hard. "How did it happen we found this gun underneath you and you lying by the desk?"

Jimmy stared at the cheap .32 caliber. He remembered pitching it away after the bullet smashed into his bone. Or had he only meant to throw it? And he remembered feeling something hard between his shoulders as he lay on the floor. His eyes fell before the boring glance of the marshal, try as he would to meet the gaze.

"You can search me," he muttered.

"I'm going to," said the marshal grimly.

HELD for trial, all the searching could not find the missing money, all the cross-examining could not shake Jimmy's story. The tramp, too, had disappeared. That helped a little. The prosecution suggested that if Jimmy gave up the money things would be much easier but his own attorney told him that there was a good chance for him and then he, too, hinted at Jimmy's having hidden it, hinted that some of it would make acquittal certain.

But then the prosecution found where Jimmy had bought the revolver or a revolver just like it. The dealer identified Jimmy absolutely and Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. The man lied. Jimmy had bought the pistol there on the date mentioned but he had gone there with old clothes long since burned, clothes that were too big for him and had been padded. He had fixed a prominent mole on one cheek with an eyebrow pencil bought in another town. He had plumped his cheeks with cotton and plugged his nostrils also. He had got all these details from some of his books.

It had changed his appearance completely and changed his voice but the dealer identified him as he was and Jimmy saw, and his attorney saw, that the prosecuting attorney was after a conviction. The fact that the dealer had sold such a gun was enough for the police. The identification was cooked and Jimmy could not refute it. But he knew where the money was and they didn't and the injustice of police methods hardened Jimmy's resistance. His record helped him with the jury and his attorney made the most of the tramp but Jimmy got five years.

HE WAS a model prisoner. That was natural. Every day saved meant twenty-four hours nearer to the money as well as to freedom. Altogether he got eight months off for good behavior and he was well under thirty when he came out. He had been made a trusty, he had worked in the penitentiary office and his health was good. And he had

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learned several things while he was in prison. He knew they would be trailing him when he got out. Detectives of the express company, the best in the land.

And he planned very carefully. He had slipped up once on account of his brain failing him through the pain of that bullet in his bone. This time it would be different. His original sentence was five years. He had prepared himself for ten. He could afford eight months in which to throw off the scent.

He went to New York. Not being particular as to what sort of job he temporarily landed he got one as a janitor in a building owned by a Greek. He saved some money and drifted south to New Orleans. Then he got on as assistant freight clerk with a fruit-liner—men were scarcer than jobs those days—and he drifted to Central America. He swapped to clerk for a plantation and got bronzed and grew a beard.

Presently he drifted in at San Francisco, got a job on the river-boats to Sacramento, quit, went off on a camping trip, shaved his beard and let all his face brown equally. tramped it up to Truckee, certain that he had shaken off the trail, hopped a train and started in dead earnest for Aurum. Now he let his mustache grow. They might still be on the outlook for him at Aurum but the search must have grown less keen with the months, ten since he had left the penitentiary, and the Joe Hammond of today in no way resembled the Jimmy Gedney of Boomville or even Number 793 of the penitentiary records.

He had filled out and broadened. His hands were roughened, he had changed his walk, he had changed his habits. The heavy black mustache hid his mouth completely and he had systematically darkened that red poll of his until it was a dull, dark color from months of passing through it a leaden comb. He wore it long and he looked like what he claimed to be, a prospector down on his luck.

He had picked a train that would take him into Aurum at nightfall. He wondered if Denton still held the night trick. Well, Denton would never recognize him. He had cultivated the low tones of his voice until he was gruff by habit. Denton would never know him.

Ten miles out of Aurum he began to recognize the country in the rapidly thickening dusk. Excitement ran through him but he held it in bounds. Outwardly he yawned, inwardly he exulted. The reward was in sight. He would put up somewhere, over the Matrix saloon, perhaps, and he'd look about a bit. He had the necessary tools in his grip for digging away the dirt from under his treasure rock. A short crowbar and a gardening trowel. Fifteen minutes work after dark!

Then he'd drift away again, out to the coast and down to South America. Lots of chances there for a man with fifty thousand or better. And no questions asked. It would be *Monte Cristo* all over again. As to the girls? Jimmy thought of them as women now. He knew he had sloughed much of his old self in prison. He'd enjoy them with the other good things of life. He laughed when he thought of the great catalog and the wardrobe he had planned. They had brought the list in at the trial, tried to use it against him. Well, he would have clothes all right. He saw himself in white linen with a Panama hat and a sash. . . .

He looked out of the window again. The scenery was unfamiliar. The brakeman called Aurum and he asked the man to repeat the information. This couldn't be Aurum! He had left it a straggling settlement among the hills. This was a town. There were brick buildings, railroad sheds!

A sudden fear struck him. The place had boomed beyond recollection. Just how far had it gone? How about the big stone? Had some one blasted it for building? He squelched his panic. They probably would not have built close to the creek. It was only a rough mining center, grown but still crude. But he was worried.

The sight of the old depot comforted him. They had built its twin across the tracks, double row, but there was no pretentious building. He caught sight of Denton at work as he lounged by, carrying his grip. A sudden bravado tempted him to accost the man but he conquered it. No use for any unnecessary risks.

When he had left Aurum the depot was perhaps half a mile from the scattering buildings of the town. Now they had welded, had crept up almost to the dumps and buildings of the mining sheds and hoists, had spread until the main street

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started close to the depot, laid out along one side of the creek. Where once had been grass and undergrowth, willows and other trees, now stood buildings in an irregular row, generally with gaps in between, wooden, false-fronted structures, crude stores and numerous saloons along the trail that Jimmy had followed that fateful midnight.

In the gaps the ground ran free to the creek. Here and there some meager foliage struggled. Across the creek it was wild as of old. But where was the big boulder? One or two arcs punctured the darkness and there were lights in the saloons. The place was shot with dense shadows and splotches of blue or orange light.

The flimsy nature of the buildings relieved Jimmy. The men who built them would not have bothered to blast such a stone as his treasure rock. They would merely have dodged it. It was still there and the treasure safe beneath it. Long since the ferns and undergrowth would have made the top-cover soil match its surroundings. It was still there, waiting for him. And here he was.

He gaged his distance pretty well, for he had made the trip too often in fact and fancy not to know its measurements. Just ahead of him was a saloon, next to it a three-story frame structure labeled, above some naked electrics, the "Good Luck Hotel." Between them ran a natural alley. At the end of it should be the big boulder. How well Jimmy remembered its contour, like a great frog squatting ready to flop into the water.

Suppose it had? Suppose a freshet had undermined the bank.

Next moment he drew a breath of relief. There was the rock, its sides grazing the saloon on one side and the hotel on the other, blocking the gap. Both buildings in the rear overhung the creek.

In a sudden revulsion he cursed aloud. Evidently there was a game running in the back room of the saloon. A reddish glow was flung clear across the alley, impinging on the hotel wall. Silhouettes of the players and onlookers showed. There was no lid in Aurum, no need for blinds. The uncurtained window was an advertisement.

Jimmy entered the saloon and bought a drink.

"All-night game?" he asked.

"Yep? Want to set in?"

"No. Need sleep. Jest off the train. Reckon I'll try the Good Luck."

There seemed little good luck the way things had stacked up. There was the treasure stone with fifty thousand odd beneath it in a cash-box, all nicely preserved in rubber-sheeting and oilcloth. But the brambles, the undergrowth, was gone. He could not dig by night or day for the first was turned into the second in Aurum by the double shifts of the miners and the light from that confounded room back of the saloon!

He wasn't going to give up. It was his and he had earned it. Jimmy figured that his imprisonment was actual work against the money. He had canceled any debt. But how to get at it? He slept little that night, waiting for daylight.

The day brought little consolation. The street was a busy one. The stone blocked the gap. The first move he made would draw a crowd by day or night. He strolled around, crossing the creek, and inspected the rock from the other side. There had been freshets. An attempt to tunnel through the soft dirt would be almost certain to bring the boulder rolling down from its already ominous overhang. It would have to be night work. He surveyed more closely. It could not be done. But the dirt was soft, as it had been. That helped and gave him the germ of an idea. He would tunnel through from the hotel.

He sought out the hotel proprietor.

"I'm up against it," he said. "Got a few dollars but I'm looking for a job inside somewhere."

"What's the matter with an outside job? You look healthy enough. Lots of work up at the Luck Hole or the Golden Hope, they tell me."

"I look all right. And I'll be all right in a while. Got a bum pump right now. Strained it. Got to lay low. I couldn't stand a shift."

"Well, I don't know as I've got anything," said the man doubtfully.

"I ain't over-particular about the pay," said Jimmy. "There ought to be a lot of odd jobs 'round here. Clearing up and that."

"Tell you what I'll do. Try it out for a week. You see if you can keep busy and useful. Then we'll talk. Keep the room you've got."

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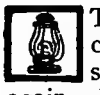
Jimmy did several odd jobs that morning. Cleaned the lower front windows for one thing. After lunch he wandered into the cellar. He had been afraid there wasn't one, but there was, a dirt excavation, cluttered up with boxes. It couldn't have been better set. He reported its condition.

"Lot of kindling wood there," he said. "When it's out there'll be storage room for other truck."

"Hop to it," said his boss.

And Jimmy hopped. He conveyed his crowbar and trowel and hid them. He had already surveyed the line of his tunnel from the outside and he laid it out from within. But he did no work beyond marking the spot to begin and making a barricade of boxes about it. It might take him a couple of nights, he figured, and he could cover his excavation with box-lids and put the dirt in the boxes. Once through he would drift—with dispatch.



THAT night he slipped down to the cellar after supper, while it was still light, and did not come up again. No one seemed to miss him. No one looked for him. He had commandeered a lantern but he did not light it, curling up on some old sacks and sleeping off and on until the cessation of sound above told him the bar was closed for the night.

Then he set to work. He got under the framework and struck some rocks that had been piled for foundation. These gave him some trouble for he was digging deep, molewise, aiming to come up at his trove under the bottom of the boulder. At five o'clock he knocked off and got up to his room unobserved, well satisfied with progress. The next night would see him through.

Once again he repeated his maneuvers. He was well past the wall and digging like a musk-rat at two in the morning when he sensed something. He drew back from his tunnel just as the trap opened and the landlord and another man came down the ladder.

"Ought to find a box down here that 'ud just suit ye," said the landlord. "Long as you got to make that early train——"

Jimmy doused his lantern. He had worn gloves and he stripped them off and tried to get back to his sacks. But the light from the landlord's lantern struck him fair.

"What you doin' down here this time of night?"

"I was down here and I had a faint spell," said Jimmy. "I dozed off on those sacks. I was just coming up."

The two men looked at him suspiciously. Jimmy remembered some casual talk of high-graders stealing rich ore and he had his suspicions also. The landlord was in with the other man. They were going to pack the ore in a box and the man would take it out on the early train. Then his suspicions were strengthened but it worked both ways.

"You get to —— out of here," said the landlord. "I don't know what you're up to snooping 'round my cellar but I won't have it. You're fired. Get out."

Jimmy tried to expostulate but it was no use. He went up the trap worrying. He had covered up the mouth of his tunnel but they might find the dirt and the displaced rocks and investigate. If they did. . . .

But the two men came up with a small box while he stood in the room.

"I told you to get out," said the landlord harshly. "Where's your things?"

"In my room."

"Get 'em and vamose. Pronto."

The man went with him while he got his grip. He had been forced to leave his tools behind in the tunnel. In two minutes he was in the street. He could cheerfully have killed the landlord if he had had a gun. A few minutes more would have seen him through. He had struck the bottom of the boulder once with his bar. He was within a few feet of a fortune that he had sweated for and done time for.

He went into the saloon and downed three drinks in succession. Then he passed out into the back room. He had some idea of watching the boulder to see if any one broke through there. Sitting by the window until dawn he consumed more drinks and made up his mind. He would have to break into the hotel the next night. He would climb up the creek bank and pry off a few planks.

He went to a rooming-house and climbed into bed, sleeping from the effects of the liquor. It was almost dark when he woke up but he found an all-night store and got a short drill. Then he ate supper, had a couple of drinks and, with the drill inside his trouser leg held by his belt, moseyed out of town and up the opposite bank of the creek in the night. Across from the

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hotel that had no windows at the back he camped out in the brush until one o'clock.

Then he waded the creek and struggled up the steep bank, smearing himself with red clay, till he reached the plank wall. It was easy to force away half a dozen boards and crawl into the cellar. He lit a match and found his lantern. The next minute he had dived into his tunnel. Five minutes later and his feverish fingers struck the sides of the iron box!

The blood surged through him. *Monte Cristo!* The world, or a part of it, was his. Now for the key. He couldn't find it. Neither the key nor the rock. And he couldn't wait. He jimmied open the lid. There was the oilcloth with the rubber bands about it, intact!

He tore them off. He stripped off the rubber sheeting. A greenback caught his eye, the top of a roll. It was a five-dollar bill!

Jimmy remembered very well the shape of those packages. Something was wrong. He peeled off the bill. Next to it was a scrap of paper. Under the paper folded sheets of newspaper torn in quarters. Nothing else!

He sat sick and dumb. Then he saw writing on the paper and read it by the light of his lantern.

PARDNER:

I'm leaving you the five-spot to make up for the four-bits you slipped me. I can use the rest. I need it and I reckon it's as much mine as yours. So long, from

OMAHA JAKE.

The tramp! The hobo he had fed and staked! The man had suspicioned something from his manner, or his giving him the half a dollar. He had watched and followed him and then. . . Jimmy groaned aloud. How long he sat there he did not know, but finally he crawled out of the cellar.

"Five dollars! A dollar a year! And he had called himself *Monte Cristo. Monte Cristo*, ——!

He crawled out through the torn boards. A splinter thrust at his coat, held him. As he struggled the wood ripped with a tearing sound. A ray shot from across the creek, its light diffusing with the distance but focusing feebly on Jimmy. A voice across the creek spoke.

"Come across with your hands up! I've got you covered! Come on!"

Jimmy obeyed. He didn't care much. The five was in his clothes. He had left the box and the rest of the rubbish in the tunnel. He waded the creek wet and mud-stained and despondent.

"Saw you sneaking across the creek," said the man. "Reckoned you'd come back this way. We been looking for high-graders."

"I'm no high-grader," said Jimmy wearily.

"Of course not," said the marshal, the same marshal who had found him in the express office five years ago. "Of course not. Nor you wasn't breaking into the hotel from the rear, neither. Though what you did that for is beyond me. What were you after?"

"Nothing," said Jimmy. "And I found it."

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BLAZE

By Warren H Miller

A CRASH in the forest—how often had Benson started at that sound! For, here in the Rockies of western Montana it could mean but one thing—game afoot. Never yet did elk or bear dash through the lodgepole pine without knocking over some dead sapling in his path, and now, at the warning sound, Benson bent his gray head to peer over the snow, under the drooping spruces to see what legs of galloping elk or bounding deer might appear.

What he saw caused the blood to pump wildly under his collar and started him into instant action, for, shuffling along at a rapid, ambling gait, was a large black bear. Benson's snow-shoes soon took him to a clear enough space to see through the forest, and he raised his rifle to fire, but a distant baying of hounds caused him to hesitate. To shoot another man's game ahead of his dogs—inexcusable! At best, if he killed, the hunter would give him a cartridge and he would hand over the bear; if he messed the thing up and the bear got away, his would be all the blame.

The hot baying of the hounds came nearer as Benson shuffled his webs over to the bear's track, and, looking back down the slope he could see them, two long-eared, rat-tailed Redbone hounds, with heads down in the trail, while behind them, stabbing over the snow, were three big Airedales. What an impression of vim and power these grim fighters made as they dashed toward Benson up the slope! With gaping tongues and long white wolf fangs, the Airedales came charging on, their grizzled muzzles white with snow.

Benson suddenly realized that he himself was in great danger, standing in the bear's trail, for many a tenderfoot, who had been thus incautious, had been torn down by excited dogs, and he hastily stepped to one side behind a clump of balsam. The dogs did not swerve a hair hair's-breadth but dashed on ahead and a double bellow from the hounds, answered by a volley of barks from the Airedales, told that they had sighted the bear and were redoubling their speed.

A faint halloo down the slope directed Benson's eyes toward the hunter, and he soon made him out, pushing along desperately on rapid skis. Another explosion of barks warned them that the game had treed, and Benson set out along the trail as fast as his portly build and elderly muscles would permit him.

Over a knoll, and, down another hog's-back where a tall sentinel pine put forth a few stubbly branches, he saw the bear at bay up in the fork, while the Airedales, three high, were striving to climb the trunk, falling back in turn as they reached about ten feet up. Benson shuffled down the slope, sweating as he never sweat before, while behind him the swift skis closed up on him fast.

"Hey—you—keep away from that there tree!" halloed the hunter at him.

Benson slackened his pace but he had already nearly covered the distance between him and the tree.

"Hey—keep away—ain't y' got no sense!" shouted the hunter.

The bear had begun to come down, head first, his furry body curled around the trunk,

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hind and fore claws dug in the bark. The Airedales dashed up the trunk at him. Benson felt that he must do something and do it quickly or the bear would get away. He raised an uncertain rifle and fired, knocking off a big chip of bark; fired again, hitting the bear in the paw. He came tumbling down amidst the dogs and a wild scene of unbelievably swift action ensued.

Strokes and slashes were given with the swiftness of lightning; bear and dogs were all over the snow; blood spattered, and a riot of snarls, growls and yelps arose as Benson dashed in, striving to get in another shot. Suddenly the bear came at him, charging with the quickness of thought. Benson had never seen such a savage face—glaring green eyes, a hideous mass of wrinkles baring glistening, formidable teeth, and the sight completely paralyzed him for the instant. He did not even raise his rifle, but his hands shot forward to tear at the bear with the instincts of the caveman.

The largest of the Airedales dashed in ahead of him, springing at the bear's throat, the impact of his body stopping the bear for an instant, and then, shot after shot rang out behind him. Benson never realized that men could shoot so fast; the bear seemed knocked down by an invisible club, his head rocked to one side, his body cringed sideways and he doubled up, a black, furry mass, covered with snarling dogs.

"Goddlemighty!" screeched the hunter glaring at him. "I knowed you'd mess it up as soon as I seed them dude sport clo'se ahead of me. What th' —— did ye shoot fer—ye lost me one of me best dogs—I wouldn't take a hundred dollars for that there Blaze."

Benson stared, stupefied. This game was too much for him, a mere city sportsman!

"Thee should not take umbrage, friend," he stammered. "I did what seemed best—for the bear was getting away."

"Why didn't ye let him go, then—them dogs whould ha' run him up the next tree—who's guidin' ye, anyhow? I'll settle it with him," rejoined the hunter wrathfully. "He has no business lettin' ye run loose in these here mountains."

"I'm sorry, friend, if I did thee wrong, and thee shalt be recompensed," said Benson, mildly, "I'm out with 'Big John' elk hunting."

"Big John—yea—I know him," nodded the hunter. "Shore, ye done the best ye knowed how, but he ought to ha' kept you with him," he continued, mollifying his tone as he started to boot the dogs off the bear's carcass. "Well, Blazie boy, ye're done fer all right—I'm afeerd we'll have ter shoot ye, boy," he said mournfully, drawing his revolver as he looked down pityingly at the largest of the Airedales.

The dog's plight was indeed serious. While the other two Airedales had taken hold behind the bear's elbow and hock bone, where his claws could do no harm, Blaze's charge had brought him well within the sweep of those long forepaws, and a terrible gash had been the result. He looked up, agonized, at them, his honest, brown eyes pleading for them to do something for him. Not a yelp of pain came from the grim old warrior, just those pained, pleading eyes, begging for these humans, who knew so much more than he did, and who had always succored him in trouble before, to help him now.

"I wouldn't hev taken a hundred dollars fer ye, Blaze," mourned the hunter, cocking his Colt.

"I beg of thee, don't," entreated Benson, raising a detaining hand. "Here is thy hundred dollars, friend—and the dog is mine. He saved my life, and thee shalt not shoot him."

"Aw, ——!" exploded the hunter. "What's the use—he's done fer, mister, I'll hev to put him out'n his misery, now."

Benson pressed a yellow-back at him.

"He's my dog, friend—thee shalt not lay a hand on him."

"Say, what's all this 'thee' and 'thy' business, stranger—hev ye got religion or sumpin'? I tell ye, ye cain't do nothin' for that 'ere dawg, nohow," ended the hunter decisively, aiming the Colt.

BENSON paid no attention to him but bent over the dog, his back between Blaze and the revolver's threatening muzzle.

"I'm a Quaker, friend, and I know something of medicine," he replied over his shoulder, "besides he is now my dog," he added, abandoning the bill and letting it drop on the snow. "Thee must leave him to me."

"Oh, well, hev it yore own way," grinned the hunter, picking up the bill. "I never

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seed no Quakers afore, but ye're shore set 'n yore ways!"

Benson stooped over the wounded dog, gently examining the ragged tear. Blaze laid a bare fang against his hand, protesting mutely but not offering to bite. The elderly Quaker drew from his hip pocket a sportsman's first-aid packet and opened from it a large bandage, some antiseptic gauze and a flat folded strip of surgical tape. He bound a ribbon of bandage around Blaze's muzzle so he could not bite, and then felt for and found the big artery that was still feebly spouting blood from the wound.

The end of this he tied with a bit of silk, while Blaze rocked his weak body under the pain, and then the antiseptic gauze was laid on in a pad and the large bandage tied firmly about the dog's body.

"How're ye goin' t' git him back to camp?" called the hunter from where he was at work skinning out the bear's carcass.

"Thee shalt see, friend," smiled Benson back at him good-humoredly, "we Quakers have a way with us."

He took off his right snow-shoe and slid it under the dog, using the thong to lash him securely to the webbing. Then he hung the other over his back, tying its thong to Blaze's improvised sled, and, slinging the rifle over his shoulder by its strap, he turned to bid the hunter farewell.

"A man'll as soon wade through hell on wax legs as git through this here snow without webs," laughed the hunter at him, "but I shore admire yore grit, Quaker. Where be ye camped?"

"Down at the fork of Big River, friend," smiled Benson. "I'll make it, somehow!"

"Three mile from here!" rejoined the hunter, shaking his head. "Well, if ye get stuck, fire three shots."

Benson waved a parting hand at the little, leather-faced, squint-eyed Government "varmint" man, and bent his shoulder to the thong. The snow-shoe, with the big sixty-pound Airedale on it, jerked after him sluggishly, a more than dead weight. Soon the sweat came fast and Benson labored and gasped for breath. He looked back. Hardly a hundred yards of the three miles had been covered, and his tracks in the snow looked like deep post-holes. He tried tying his broad bandanna under the snow-shoe to make it smoother on the under side, and this helped some, but it was continually getting misplaced from its forward tie over the toe, and finally a branch caught it and ripped the frail texture to ribbons.

He had reached the top of the main hill perhaps a half-mile on his way, with the hunter working over the bearskin still visible, his dogs tied to various trees about him, and Benson had to confess himself nearing the end of his strength. A sickening weariness possessed him—two and a half miles yet to go, and that dead weight clogging his every step! What a labor it had been! To draw one's leg from a deep mire of snow and literally carry it forward to another foothold, to turn and strain at the stubborn snow-shoe until it left its grip on the snow to leap forward a pace, endlessly repeating this same formula of toil—it would tax a far younger man than he to make the long trail to camp!

Besides, even stoical, courageous Blaze was beginning to whine under the lift and drop of the sled. Benson sat down and put his wits to work. Back-packing the dog with an Indian tump-line seemed the only real solution. He made a forehead strap of his belt and attached the towing thong to each end of this strap, securing it to the oak brace of the snow-shoe at the right length to carry well on his back when the forehead strap came taut over his brow. Then he stood the shoe up on its tail, and, with many a whine from Blaze, staggered onward through the snow.

Again and again he lost the blaze-marks on the distant tree which marked the trail, and had to drop his burden and search until the former blaze was found. The trip was one long agony of toil; only the indomitable spirit of the Quaker, led on by his religious conception of his duty to the dumb beast that had saved his life, kept him unflaggingly at it.

Half-way to camp he had to pass what is known in those mountains as Leaping Rock. It juts out of a fearful slope, pitching down into a yawning chasm two thousand feet below. The slide falls away so steeply below it that it is impossible to get around, and above is a sheer precipice for many feet. The one way to surmount it is to make your horse leap up on it, when, for a breathless instant, you are poised in thin air with nothing below you

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for immeasurable distances. Then the good beast's hind feet find the rock and he scrambles up to safety, with the rider still in the saddle.

Timid tenderfeet have often refused to ride any further at this place and attempted to get off and force the pony to follow after, but most of the cayuses balk, and, tugging the reins out of the tyro's hand, cause a lively chase back along the trail until captured again. No; the only way to do Leaping Rock is in the saddle, when the pony feels the familiar command of whip and spur, and is under the sense of human mastery from the man in the saddle.

And no man ever leaped down Leaping Rock under any circumstances, for, with the momentum of a man on his back, no pony could withstand the urge to precipitate himself on down the deadly slope. As it is, the bones of many a pony and rider lie forgotten somewhere down between those two mountains.

No one has done aught but lead and coax his pony down Leaping Rock — no one, that is, except Big John. That huge, black-haired dare-devil did it more than once—out of sheer bravado, and, by superb mastery of his horse, managed to stick to the lower trail.

When Benson arrived there, three times he tried to mount the Rock, and each time Blaze's heavy weight pulled him back in mid-air, and only by the most desperate clawing at the rock crannies was he able to get his feet safely back on the trail again. He finally accomplished it alone, hauling Blaze up after him, and so, with many a rest, many a weary, despondent stop when it seemed impossible to call up strength enough for a single further effort, he staggered along under the spruces to where a white wall-tent lay half-buried in the snow.

Home! Cold and cheerless though it was, with dead ashes in the stove and a damp skin of moisture on everything in the tent, it was home—out of the snow and wind, away from battle with the endless and pitiless persecutions of Nature. Benson set Blaze gently down in a corner, undid his lashings and made a bed for him of saddle blankets. He stared, stupid with fatigue, at the stove until a warning chill told him that he must set about fire-making.

Soon billets and kindlings from the woodpile were roaring in the little red sheet-iron demon, called whimsically the "Pig" by Big John, that produced comfort and good cheer within while the blizzard howled outside. He moved the dog up near its glowing warmth, for he, too, was chilled to the bone, and his legs and ears were stone cold.

II

CAME a mighty horn of a voice outside, singing a roaring cow chanty, the notes vibrant with a stern, virile manliness:

Whoopee—de-i-yaho!
Gitalong lit-tle dôgie,
For 'tis your misfortune and none of my own!
Whoop-ee—de-i-yaho!
Gitalong lit-tle dôgie,
For I know that Wy-o-ming will be your new home!

The song steadily approached as Benson went outside the tent, and Big John, on his black charger, Nig, plowed steadily through the snow until almost stepping on the tent. The great cowman held up a warning hand for Benson not to interrupt the song; he and Nig would have ridden right over tent and all if it had not come to a conclusion just in time!

"Roll yer blankets!" shouted he. "Roll yer blankets—th' snow's four feet deep up on the Big Hump an' we got ter git th' hosses out right smart sudden!"

He leaped from the saddle and handed Benson a couple of fool-hens off the pommel horn.

"Well, old settler, what you been up to 'thout y're webs on? I seen y're tracks this mile back like so many holes for picket wire corral posts."

Benson felt a little thrill at that "old settler." Up to the time he had killed his elk, he had always been "Mister Benson" to Big John. The coveted sobriquet, "old-timer" or "old settler" was never bestowed by the mountain men until you had graduated from the tenderfoot or "dude sport" class and had earned some small measure of respect.

Big John's was a tall figure of a man, black-haired, black-eyed, with long, limber muscles that rippled under his stag shirt as if it were his veritable skin, and he judged a man simply and only by his sheer manliness—not his mental attributes, or how much of a man he might be back East, but by what figure he might cut in these

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iron mountains, with the vicissitudes of big-game hunting and the hardships of the snow trail to try him out. To be called old-timer by him was to be tacitly acknowledged as having passed all tests and admitted to full membership.

"Git y're stuff together an' start loading the panniers, fer we got t' be seven miles up in the sky toward the Divide by night," said Big John, shouldering his way into the tent. "Gawd! Where'd ye git him?" indicating Blaze, who looked up at him from his bed.

Benson told the story.

"You'd ought to ha' shot him, old-timer. We got ter leave him as it is, for it'll be two weeks before he can stand on his feet, and he'll hev a fever and want a lot of nursing if you pull him through at all. Besides, we got to get out right sudden or the passes of the Divide will be snowed in to the hosses, an' we're in here till next June when the thaw comes."

"Can't thee make a toboggan and tow him out?" suggested Benson. "For, I warn thee, John, this poor brute nearly lost his life to save mine, and I shall see him through, if I have to stay here alone."

"Ye'll stay alone, all right—then," laughed Big John harshly. "Them hosses is nigh starved now, livin' on elk feed, and I ain't going to lose my hosses for no dawg, nohow. We kin stay here until tomorrer, seein' you're too plumb tuckered to move agin' today; but, tomorrer we gits, an' that's final."

"Tomorrow I stay, and that's final—unless thee finds a way to take Blaze along," retorted Benson, and Big John knew that when the mild-tempered old Quaker had made up his mind it was useless to argue with him.

That night Blaze had a high fever, which continued all through the next day, and, as the weather turned fair with no more snow falling, Big John agreed to stay until the fever abated, "though them hosses is gittin' weaker an' weaker on this mountain medder pawin'."

Benson had plenty of time to reflect as he sat silently over Blaze, while Big John mended pack-saddles and horse gear. Benson began to realize that a lot of character building had been done on him during these three weeks in the mountains.

He looked back in amazement to a mental picture of himself, like a scene from a movie screen, sitting at a directors' table, the largest stockholder in a big engine-building corporation, and—voting like a fool, a coward! The younger men of the company had looked pleadingly at him, begging him with silent eyes to cast his vote with them on the side of progress and modernization of their output, and against the reactionism and stand-pat policy of the older men. His own boy, that same bright vigorous youth to educate whom he had paid a fortune at foreign universities, and who had brought back from the Continent a new steam engine that far outclassed anything of the kind made in our own country—how could he ever forget the reproachful eyes that that boy—and all these other eager progressive younger men—had turned on him when he had played the weakling and voted "No!"

He looked back upon himself now in indignant scorn. That new engine was the trump card—the salvation of his company—and he had voted against it! No wonder a nervous collapse had followed and the doctor had ordered a big-game trip as the one sure road to recuperation! And his boy—how Benson's eyes had avoided his after that fateful decision!

He came to these mountains, anemic, decrepit, with no confidence in himself, picking a morsel of camp-fire here and there, having a headache at the end of each march, his Quaker steadfastness his sole saving trait—a big baby to be nursed by the not over-tender solicitations of Big John.

That was three weeks ago. Now a different Benson leaned over the helpless Airedale, a mere dog, if you will, but one whose undaunted courage, whose blazing soul had shone into his own like a star and kindled a yearning feeling of emulation, a desire above all other things to be possessed of such a dauntless spirit himself. If he had had but a moiety of that dog's decision and resourcefulness in time of danger—there would have been no nursing to be done!

He—with a powerful rifle in his hands and a man's brain and experience—to be saved from annihilation by the decision and courage of a dog! And that engine matter—a crisis in his life and that of many others dependent upon him—why had he not had the courage to do and dare?

Once he had asked Big John about it,

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during one of their camp-fire talks just to see how a man of his stamp would have faced such a situation.

"Me, ——, I'd have voted with the boys every time!" came back Big John. "What if ye did have to learn th' hull country about the new injyne—th' pin-headed public's allus got to be led around by th' nose, and the man that kin do it's the boy that gits th' kale."

WHICH was good sound logic, and precisely the argument that his own boy had used. Benson began to feel that way himself—now! It would take every penny of his fortune and that of the older men of the company to give the boys their chance. Even their homes, their investments for old age would have to be staked—to say nothing of all the waning stock of their company—against that magnificent chance to win out; and it meant renewed and redoubled work for all of them, just at a time when the older men hoped to let things run along smoothly in their accustomed grooves.

But the competition of the steam turbine had jarred them rudely out of such dreams, leaving them but the choice of allowing the old company to die out, each man saving what he could of the accumulated fortunes they had amassed during the long and busy life of the company, or else of adopting the new engine, and giving the younger men who had grown up with them the chance to win for all of them, restoring the former value of the stock and making their own fortunes out of it likewise. It was a huge risk—but—Benson began to wish he was back home once more in Sharon, Ohio.

When he got back, a final meeting would probably be called, in which either a receiver for the corporation would be appointed or else the new engine adopted and all their fortunes pledged in a bond issue to make it a success—and his would be the deciding vote!

The third day Blaze's fever disappeared and he began to mend rapidly.

"Seen a cat track this morning," announced Big John ominously, shaking his head as he entered the tent. "That means we got to up an' git. I'll fix up a bed on top of one of the packs for that 'ere dawg, an' we'll hit the trail."

Benson laughed.

"Thee art not afraid of a catamount, Big John?" he inquired, smiling benevolently at him.

"Gawd, no!" exploded Big John. "Ain't afeerd o' nawthin'. It's the hosses—he'll git one, shore, if we stay."

Benson felt the dog over appraisingly.

"I think he'll do tomorrow. Rig up a bed on top of the panniers on one of the pack-animals and we'll try it."

That day the time passed interminably. Benson fretted and worried over his company's affairs and was not surprised to find himself developing a fever. The long vigil over Blaze, the overtaxing fatigue of getting him to camp, the headache that had inevitably followed it, the still greater mental fatigue of worrying over slack engine sales at home, now that the excitements of the hunting trail had given place to long, still reflective hours in the tent and his mind had wandered back to the business cares from which his doctor had sent him away—all had combined to pull him down. His pulse was racing and he felt chilly and burning up, all at the same time.

Big John noticed it when he returned that evening.

"Shore you ain't lookin' right, old-timer," he exclaimed with some concern as soon as he laid eyes on Benson.

"Never mind me, friend, let's get home if thee hast to lash me to the saddle. We shall start tomorrow, no matter what condition I am in."

"You shore has grit, ol' pardner," said Big John tenderly, "an' we shore has got to make tracks outer here right smart, but I'm settin' here to tell you, old-timer, that it looks to me like next June!"

That was the last straw. Next June! Big John did not joke. With the passes of the Continental Divide closed against them; with no way to get down the valley past the terrible zig-zags of the gorge, down Java way, utterly impassable when the avalanches of deep snow hurled ceaselessly down them, it would be impossible to get out to the rails, except to walk out on webs—sixty miles—abandoning horses and equipment, which Big John would never do, for a Winter in the woods meant nothing to him. Next June—what would become of the company meanwhile? And so Benson worried himself off into a feverish sleep.

When next he awoke it was with a dull sense of a great lapse of time. He seemed

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to have lived through some sort of an experience, he couldn't just recall what. He seemed to remember wild shrieks during the night, without being able to recall anything connected with them. He was surprised to find Blaze standing over him wagging his short stump of a tail, and, through the open flap of the tent the sun was shining and Big John was jerking elk meat on a pole frame. None of these things were even thought of when he last remembered anything.

"Hi, old settler—you come to!" shouted Big John joyfully, catching sight of his open eyes through the tent door. "Say, you've been dotty more'n a week! Lay still, now, don't try to git up."

Benson lay back and did not say anything for some time; he tried to think it out.

"Are we snowed in?" he finally asked, piecing out the meaning of the jerky frame.

"Shorest thing ye know! We ain't got but three hosses left. Cat et one, and Sandy, he run over the Big Hump back to the Park I reckon, for he ain't left no tracks around here nohow."

"Is there no way——"

"Now you lay still, pardner," interrupted Big John with rough tenderness, "an' don't think none about getting back to the rails for some time jist yet. Me 'n' you's going to have a —— of a fine time trappin' and huntin' 'round in these parts for a while—an' I'll make a man out of you yet!"

Benson lay back and thought a while. Why not? What was the use—let the company go—one's health was the best thing after all, and a Winter in these mountains with Big John would gain him ten years of life. He fondled Blaze's grizzled head. Those adoring, honest brown eyes were fixed on his, burning with a love and affection that no future vicissitudes could dim. His dog!

To hunt with Blaze and Big John, winning back health and strength, and then go back and put some stern iron resolution into his timid fellow-directors—to lead the boys to victory with the new engine—not so bad! Blaze was a good beginning anyhow—perhaps he himself could learn to shoot without getting excited, to manage the horses himself, to run a blazed trail without getting lost, track down his own game, cook his own grub—do all the things that a man had to do in this country to stay alive.

Then his old Quaker stubbornness came back with a rush. Next June would be too late. He had to get out, and that as soon as possible, for the reorganization would take place soon, if it had not already been done. He well knew what the next financial report would precipitate.

"Thee must take me out, Big John," he said feebly, "as soon as thee may, later if thee must."

"Don't worry, old settler, we'll manage it somehow, if we have to go out on webs!" reassured Big John. "Won't be no hosses left in another week anyhow. He's around 'most every night now, an' I kain't stay awake all th' time."

"It seems I recall a screech—when I was in my fever," answered Benson. "Was that a cougar prowling around?"

"You bet! He's an ol' he-one! I'm settin' here to tell you! An' plumb hungry. They's two fresh grizzly tracks up the valley a piece, but they don't come around camp none. But this old panther boy—ye'll hear him tonight. I got th' hosses in a rope corral right close t' th' tent. Nig, an' Nell, your gray mare, and Devil, one o' the pack-cayuses, is left."

Benson lay back in his fur sleeping-bag and closed his eyes. The effort had been too much for him and he realized now how weak he really was. To attempt to stand up—impossible! Blaze sniffed over him a minute or so sedulously, and then curled up alongside with his back against the outside of the bag—just as near his master as he could get. Big John came into the tent, rolled up his huge cowman bed-roll, swept up the floor with a faggot broom and put a few more billets of wood into the tent stove. It already glowed redly but the tent seemed none too warm for Benson.

"A feller could get almighty —— hot a-settin' on that there stove!" mused Big John. "Hed to keep her a-goin', night an' day, to keep you from ketchin' a chill."

He peered into the mulligan pot to see that the stew was in no danger of scorching, set back the coffee pail, put on a fruit mixture of dried apples, peaches and prunes, spat on the stove for luck and went out to tend his jerky fire. Over a pole frame hung long strips of elk meat, just high enough above a small smudgy fire to dry out steadily without cooking. When they got through

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oozing drops of fat they would be done and a reserve supply of meat for the Winter would be assured.

Then he chopped the night wood for the stove, fed Benson some broth from the mulligan, and afterward left to forage elk-park feed for the horses, whose gaunt bones were a pitiable sight indeed. And so the long day wore on.

THAT night as the glow in the stove dimmed to dull cherry, Blaze suddenly raised his great fuzzy head and rumbled a savage growl in his throat. It died in a whine, for his side was still tender. Then, out of the still forest, arose a hoarse shriek, like a Gargantuan caterwaul, a ropy, savage mew, wild and menacing in its animal ferocity. The horses neighed and pawed the snow, while Blaze sprang to his feet and would have dashed to battle out of the tent door had not Big John's ready hand caught him by the collar.

"That's him!" muttered Big John, crawling out of his sleeping-bag and picking up his Winchester.

The heavy rifle, a cheerful young cannon with a knockout-punch, swung its yawning muzzle over Benson's head as Big John threw down the lever, putting a cartridge into the chamber. He stepped to the tent door and aimed the rifle in the general direction whence had come the panther's screech. A deafening ear-smashing roar split the silence, its echoes rumbling and reverberating down the mountain chain, while a ripping crackle of broken saplings told of the bullet's course through the timber.

"Jist to let him know we's here," grinned Big John. "That gen'ally does him for one night."

Two days later there came a sunny thaw. The forest and mountains were one still panorama of blazing whiteness, and the soft snow packed under foot so that a man did not sink in it but a short distance and even the horses only went in to some two feet of depth.

"They's jist a chanct that the snow's like this up on the Big Hump," quoth Big John, "an' if we're ever goin' to get out afore Spring, now's the time."

"Thee can depend upon me to stay in the saddle, friend," said Benson, grimly, for he had been able to walk about somewhat as his strength slowly returned, "and, as for Blaze, he will ride nicely if you can arrange a flat bed on top of Devil's pack."

"Well, we'd oughta do half-way up to the Divide today, anyhow; they's a nice spring up about seven miles through the timber, an' we'll be that much ahead, pardner," returned Big John as he set about packing the panniers and caching all the outfit that could not be carried.

Devil's pack-saddle went on him for the first time in over a month, but the cayuse was too gaunt to offer his usual bucking performances. His panniers were filled with jerked elk meat, rice, flour, beans, sugar and coffee, topped by Big John's bed-roll. Over this a tarp, and Big John threw the Lone Jack diamond hitch, to the stout ropes of which he lashed Benson's snow-shoes side by side, forming a sort of platform. On this went the tent, roughly folded and secured by its own ropes. It formed a wide bed, on to which Blaze was lifted and tied by his collar.

Nig and the gray mare each had McClellan saddles, with the regulation Army saddle-bags which were loaded with supplies, and Benson's sleeping-bag, made into a long roll, was lashed to the cantle. Then, with a hand from Big John he got up into the saddle and the procession started cheerily off up the valley.

Benson now realized why the blazes were cut so high on the trees; they had been made by the forest-ranger in the dead of Winter, when the snow was fifteen feet deep. Cruising along on snow-shoes his ax had barked a blaze where it could not be buried; already the snow was three feet up on the trunks.

The going was hard and slow. Often the horses punched through where a down tree had made a vacuum under it, bridged by snow, and there they floundered and wallowed, breathing stertorously as their hoofs sought something firm. Big John chanted "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," mostly out of tune—but he was all there with the rhythm—for the general atmosphere of the day had gotten into him and the exhilaration of the homeward trip put him in high spirits.

He spied a grouse in the top of a spruce, whipped out his six-shooter and brought it down with one shot, retrieved it from a snow-bank and soon had it hanging to the pommel.

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And so, with many a tumble, they worked on to the great slopes of Leaping Rock. Here was but a smooth bank of pure whiteness, but they could make out the indistinct form of the rock, hidden under a hummock of snow. Big John was roaring out the tramping rhythms of "The Texas Ranger" as he neared the rock. The old dare-devil exaltation, of supreme self-confidence possessed him, and Benson held his breath as Big John neared the rock with no slackening of his pace, no halt in his song. Was the crazy devil going to make Nig leap down that rock, now?

He yelled a cry of protest, but Big John waved his free hand impatiently, checked Nig's reins and put the spurs to him. The horse gathered back on his haunches, and, amid an imploring volley of imprecations from Benson, launched himself in mid-air. Benson covered his face. Would Nig, the sure-footed, make it? There was a frantic beating of hoofs on slippery snow, a cracking slip of grinding shoes, and, with squeals of terror from the horse and roars of curses from Big John, horse and rider fell over sidewise, rolled over and over down the hill, gathering snow like an enormous snowball with every revolution, until a veritable avalanche went whizzing down the awful slope, down into the bottomless chasm thousands of feet below!

A muffled *boom* rose out of the depths and was reechoed solemnly from the surrounding white peaks. Big John had dared once too often!

Benson felt the world turning black before his eyes. The revulsion was too great. His rifle, which he had been carrying across his saddle bow in the hopes of a shot at grouse, fell from his nerveless hands; he reeled and pitched fainting out of the saddle into the deep snow.

III

WHEN next he came to, Blaze was sniffing anxiously over him. He had bitten his collar rope in two and sprung down off the pack-cayuse to his master's side, and the pack-horse stood dejectedly in his tracks just as he had been standing when Big John made his foolhardy leap. The gray mare was gone. She knew the way home, and, as Big John had often warned him, to let go her reins a moment was to have her set out ahead on the trail, where only another horse could catch her.

Her tracks showed she had most carefully negotiated the rock, and they led on endlessly as far as he could see into the timber. No use trying to catch her now, unless possibly she might have gotten stalled somewhere. All his personal effects were on her—and his sleeping-bag!

Benson's first conscious sense was of dull, aching grief. To lose a friend like Big John—now he realized how deeply into his affections the great, heroic cowman had come. In fact, take him all in all, Benson could not recall a friend back East that he liked so much as this rough yet tender, imperious yet lovable son of the mountains. It was Big John the "pardner" that Benson's heart bled for, not Big John the capable and experienced guide.

His own situation without Big John hardly dawned on him as yet. Here he was alone, found as well as any mountain man, with a good rifle in his hands, food on the pack-animal, but with his appalling ignorance and inexperience a bar to pushing on back to the rails. Even the trail was marked for him by the sagacious mare. Could he make it?

Well, he'd have to—or perish! And on was the only way. No use going back to the cache and trying to stick out the Winter alone. He would have to use his wits all the time and make no mistakes, for each one would count for life or death!

He led the cayuse, ever so carefully, down the rock and then put Blaze back up on his perch. Presently they reached the thick timber again and toiled along through a country of giant green spruces that soughed overhead in the wind. The day was waning; he must have lain unconscious several hours. They toiled on indomitably, the elderly Quaker, his face wrapped in sorrow and foreboding, breaking the trail and leading on the patient horse.

As the shadows began to fall, a growing feeling of being followed began to possess him. Just a distant crack in the timber, occasionally, but always that sense of being shadowed, stalked. Was it imagination? Blaze soon dispelled that; he, too, began to look back, and a savage fire glowed in his eyes as deep growls rumbled in his throat. Benson thanked his Maker that he still had the dog; at least he could camp in security with that sleepless ear to warn

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him. And he looked at his rifle with renewed affection.

Never again would he make fun of it or allow his boy to call it the "rusty trifle" even in fun. Not for nothing had the pioneers and mountain men coined that phrase "trusty rifle;" rather had it been born out of confidence and affection. For, now, it was his sole reliance against the tooth and claw of wild beast.

More and more distinct became the certainty of being followed. It must be the big cat, reflected Benson; cougars were often known to track human beings, though seldom had they courage enough to attack. But, at night, with the camp-fire burned to ashes—what then? He looked back over the trail with ready rifle, but, aside from an occasional moving bush, could see absolutely nothing. A more experienced man than he would have hummed a shot at those bushes for what fright the crashing bullet might awaken, but he had not yet gotten to that point of decision.

The sun set redly over a great unnamed white peak, and the timber became dark. It was high time to camp. He stopped and unpacked the cayuse, struggling vainly with the diamond hitch, which would have been simplicity itself to unlock for a cowman. He spent an hour trying to put up the tent, as he felt its added security would be a big factor at night, instead of sleeping out wrapped up in it for its warmth as a mountain man would have done.

What to do with the pack-animal worried him. He remembered that they were usually hobbled, but whether tied also he could not recall, and, to make assurance doubly sure, he put on the hobbles as best he could—and then tied the animal by his halter to a sapling! Then he built a roaring fire, stuck up the snow-shoes where they would get dry, cooked a meal of jerked elk mulligan with rice and finally dozed in front of the fire before the tent door.

He slept fitfully. A few hours after dark, that hideous, hoarse mew of the panther rent the silence; out in the timber this time, only a short distance away. Benson felt the hair raise on the back of his neck as he sprang to his feet and volleyed the spot with his rifle. Devil tugged frantically at his halter. Benson heard a desperate struggle out in the snow, and then a crack of bones and a deep groan from the horse. Holding Blaze's collar, he dashed out into the snow with a brand from the fire. The fool horse had been winding his feet around the sapling with the rope, and, in struggling at the panther's cry had broken both forelegs in his unreasoning terror.

A rifle bullet to put him out of his misery was the only thing, now. Well, he had the webs anyway, thought Benson, as he aimed the rifle, but how to pack out enough stuff to keep himself alive during the going would be a problem. No tent, now—that was sure—he couldn't begin to think of carrying its big bulk.

The night wore on, with no further disturbance from the catamount, whose hunting cry sounded but faintly, twice more, down the valley. Benson sat on his haunches, toasting first one side, then the other, with Blaze cuddled up close at his feet. Somehow he seemed less and less gloomy. Something of man's primal nature seemed to come up in him as he squatted in the ancient caveman's posture of rest, before the fire with arms across his knees and head resting on them.

What bold, far-reaching plans he matured for the future management of his company when he once set foot again in Shaaron, Ohio! And that raising of hair on his neck—how good it had felt! The stubbly unshaven growth had actually bristled, Benson recalled, running his hand over the spot usually so soft and meek in the modern man. He wouldn't have believed that, like a battling dog, the human neck actually could bristle in the presence of danger from wild beast. It certainly had not done so when the bear charged him; then he had merely stood paralyzed like a scared rabbit, frightened out of his wits.

The next morning the first thing he went for was his snow-shoes. If Blaze could only make it, floundering after, the webs would take him out. He looked at them casually, then with a sickening feeling of disaster. They seemed black and dry—burned! More inexperience! He turned away sick at the stomach.

Those webs had been stood a lot too close to the fire, if he had only known it, and, during the night the stout caribou hide had baked and cooked until they were dry chips. They punched through at even a moderate pressure of his thumb! Benson cursed himself bitterly. How cruel Nature was—how she punished every mistake with

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your life's blood! Even the frames were warped—and he had never noticed!

That day was a purgatory of toil. He and Blaze floundered on, stopping again and again to rest. Benson, worn out with fatigue, vowed again and again that the next time he drew his leg from the deep snow to lift it painfully ahead would be the last. Up and up the trail led, through dense lodge-pole pine so thick that, once off the narrow cleared track, a man could scarce shoulder through it.

It was fourteen miles to the top of the Divide, and the huge mountain seemed to pile itself endlessly above him. Again and again Benson lay down in the snow and gave himself up to utter despair. Only Blaze, snuffing and whining solicitously over him gave him courage for yet another effort.

By nightfall they had reached the spring, some seven miles up the mountain slope, and here the tall spruces hung in great clusters and thickets while the mountain-side formed a somewhat level space with the ground sloping away gently. As darkness fell that eery feeling of being followed came over him again and he looked back anxiously over the trail. Then there was a snap in the forest, over to the right, and Blaze barked out a volleying roar and dashed off through the spruces. This would never do! The dog, even at his full strength, would be no match for a cougar! Benson, with a sickening foreboding of utter disaster, jumped frantically after him. As well catch the wind!

"Blaze! Blaze! Blaze!" he shrieked, tumbling and floundering through the snow.

Oh, why hadn't he kept the dog on a leash? His only answer was a bark which came back to him fainter and fainter through the forest. He must save that dog or die, Benson vowed, as, with bursting heart he drove himself along the track—Blaze was all he had left in the world.

PRESENTLY he came to where Blaze had struck the cougar track, great pugs in the snow, and dog and beast left their trail for him to follow. Half a mile further—Benson's heart stopped. Here Blaze had made his last stand. Here the cougar, realizing that only a dog was following him, had turned and given battle. Blood sprinkled the snow, bits of hair and skin lay about in the torn and trampled purity of that white covering. It had been a battle royal, in spite of Blaze's weakened condition. And there—just under the weeping limb of a giant spruce, lay a brown furry body.

A lump came up into Benson's throat. He choked, and scalding tears came to his eyes. He knelt down tenderly over the poor carcass. Only a dog—with his clenched teeth still full of viscera from the cougar's throat—but what dauntless courage, what undying devotion lay here!

"Blaze! Blaze!" sobbed Benson, his arms around the dead dog's body. "Hadst thee naught but courage? Ah, could not but one drop of fear have entered thy valiant soul? Oh, Blaze—why didn't thee wait? Thou and I, together, old—old-timer—" he stuttered out the title of forest knighthood through his tears—"thou and I—we could have beaten him!"

He mounded up the snow gently, and turned silently away.

Then he sat down wearily. Alone! Not even a dog! All lost through his own hopeless incompetence. Well, these pitiless mountains might as well take his own life, too!

Yet not alone, either. The rifle lay across his knees, blue and polished and business-like, the one capable thing left in all these miles of wild savagery. He eyed it reflectively. With it in his hands he was still master.

"Now, for God's sake, don't thee jam it!" he exclaimed to himself in bitter self-reproach.

He was surprised to find himself swearing. In all his long, gentle Quaker life, he had never yet taken God's name in vain, though he heard it done in every possible variation among the mountain men, who used no other language on the pack-animals. Now he was learning the lingo of the long trail!

He set out back to the spring, back-tracking his own trail. Again that uncanny sense of being followed! It pringled up from the roots of his spine, an instinct harking back to the cavemen.

"What if—yes—you!" he told himself. "That cat—wants—you! You're next!" he whispered, hastening along, faster and faster through the dark spruces.

Again the hair rose on his neck, and, running his hand up there, he was not surprised to find the stubbly bristles sharp and stiff like a two-days' beard. An

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ungovernable impulse to run, to flee in terror possessed him. He dared not look back. And then a wilder impulse seized him—to turn about and face—something! He must do it—and quickly! He had not felt that since, as a tiny child, he had the same impulse come over him when going downstairs in the dark. Suddenly he whipped about, his nerves in a jangle, his teeth bared, a savage snarl on his face.

And there, not thirty feet behind him, was the great cat, crouching in the snow, gathered for a spring!

Benson growled savagely as his eyes spat fire. His feet planted themselves like rocks and the rifle rose to his shoulder. The cat made a creeping run with incredible swiftness, his eyes green, a hideous wrinkle of snarls covering his face. Benson laughed grimly and let him come. At just the right moment the rifle spoke, full into that devilish face, and the cougar, as if struck with a giant flail, recoiled.

A blow of more than two tons had driven its massive force into him, shattering the skull, paralyzing the nerve system, and the beast lay quivering in the snow before him. Twice more Benson drove the heavy bullet into the carcass, and, as the life went out with a grunting flurry of thrashing paws, he jumped fiercely on the carcass and yelled with joy.

Fremiet's statue of the dancing caveman, with a bear's head over his shoulder and stone ax on belt, came to memory, and, like him, Benson too danced in a wild orgy of victory. A man at last! A fig for all the beasts in this whole howling wilderness, anyhow—he was master. He knew it, now! Any more cougars, bears or varmints want to try conclusions—he'd show 'em! And right here was the place to camp, too. Right beside the kill. Cougar meat was mighty good, none better—and that hide, twisted into babiche would make new webbing for his snow-shoes, and he would win out.

He threw off his pack, and started skinning out the hide. Good to wrap in, too, come night, as he recalled the shivering hours of the night before. He started a fire, broiled some fresh tenderloin from the carcass, butchered the rest of it with his belt ax and hung it up in the tree. Wouldn't do to leave that fresh meat around; too many grizzlies about! Right near here they had got a shot before, at an old sow with two husky cubs, but she had escaped them—and she "used" around here yet.

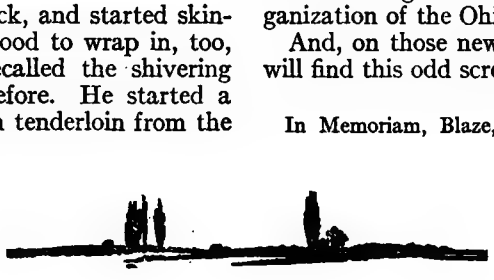
He glanced up into the spruce. Yes, there was the ancient home of the human race—up in a tree! He cut boughs and made a platform, covering it with thick browse. Then he hauled up the rifle, pack and skin, wrapped himself in the latter—and laughed as the fire burned itself down into the snow. Ha! Who was master now? Then he rolled up in the warm hide and went comfortably and securely to sleep.

The next day he back-tracked down the mountain to where he had left the snow-shoe frames. Not so badly warped after all, and enough left of the filling to make a diagram of the web in the snow. He cut rawhide from the skin, working 'round and 'round an eight-inch circle in the center, each spiral cutting outside of the one before until he had yards and yards of tough stringy skin. Then he filled the frames, following the diagram—a hitch over the forward bar, then down to the rear bar and then back again, making an equilateral triangle—repeating again an inch further along the bar—*pish*, why there was nothing to it!

He was delighted to find the frame filling itself as he followed this simple formula, and by the day's end the shoes were done. That night and for the next four nights he bunked out in browse dens, lined with feathery balsam browse, with a roaring fire in front. He got over his fear of possible bears, and came to realize that they were not night prowlers; no more panthers, rare enough anyhow in those mountains in Winter, came to bother him; and so he worked out to the rails—to send that historic telegram which forced the reorganization of the Ohio Engine Company.

And, on those new bond certificates you will find this odd scroll—

In Memoriam, Blaze, Airedale Courageous.



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GABOREAU THE TERRIBLE

A Five-Part Story

PART II

By Gordon Young

Author of "Gaboreau," "Murder!" etc.

The first part of the story quickly retold in story form.

I will torture you for six months. Then kill you.
G.

One night several weeks after I had received this strange note I paced the dark rainy streets with thoughts of its writer uppermost in my mind. I knew that "G" stood for Gaboreau and that Gaboreau made no idle threats. Yet I was not afraid. Clever and powerful as I knew Gaboreau to be, I felt that I was his match.

Suddenly from the shadows staggered the slight figure of a boy.

"German spies have murdered me," he whispered, and fainted in my arms.

I looked at him closely. He seemed almost cut to pieces. His features were aristocratic and unmistakably French.

I did not call the police. Perhaps you will think that I took matters too much in my own hands. Yet I knew I was justified. I knew the bungling efforts of the police. And if there is anything I detest it is a German spy. I was determined to seek out the Teuton devils who were behind the attempted assassination of this boy. My years as professional gambler and my experiences in combating the fiendish cunning of the crippled Gaboreau had put me up against stranger situations than this.

I carried the boy to a door near by and rapped. A pale girl with blond bobbed hair opened. A few words explained the situation. I left the boy in her dingy room and went for a taxi.

A blow upon the head with my automatic persuaded the reluctant chauffeur of the first car I met to put himself and his motor at my disposal, despite the shrill protest of his passenger, a hard-faced, overdressed woman.

As we carried the wounded boy into the car, a man came out of the shadows, looked at the lad and gave the woman a stare of recognition.

It was apparent that the two knew more than a little about this strange affair.

Determined to sift the matter to the bottom, I forced the man to get into the car and gave the chauffeur my address. The pale little blonde, who said her name was Bessie, came also. On the way to my house the man whispered to the woman, in German—

"What will H say?"

AT HOME I found another message awaiting me.

You will find arsenic in your coffee-can in pantry. This is to show you I hold your life in the hollow of my hand. Some day I will close that hand.
G.

I sent for Dr. Roberts to attend to the wounded boy. Then I started my cross-examination of the woman who had been the limousine's passenger.

"Who is H?" I asked.

"I won't tell you."

"Speaking of initials, what do you think G might stand for? Gaboreau, for example?"

I had taken a long chance and had won. She was frightened speechless. The name of the powerful crook was a word to conjure with. By skilful employment of it I elicited from the woman the information that H was a German agent.

"I was going to keep an appointment with him where you stopped my car," she said. "Mr. Smith, the man you made come along with us, is working for him also."

Believing that fear of Gaboreau would keep her from doing any harm, I let her go. She had to drive her car herself. Her chauffeur was dead drunk.

George Barton, my butler, had seen to that. A few rye highballs had made the chauffeur very loquacious.

"Said his name was 'Bad Bill' Condon," re-

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marked George. "The lady's name is Leonore Musset and she lives at 5-A Kingston Apartments."

I turned my attention to Mr. Smith, who had been sitting in the dining-room under the watchful eye of my mute Chinese, Yang Li.

"Ever hear of Gaboreau?" I began.

He had. The effect upon him of that name was more startling than it had been upon the woman.

It was but little trouble to get his story. H was at war to the knife with Gaboreau. Why, Smith did not know. H had "been interested in" the boy who now lay wounded up-stairs. The boy's name was Jean Latour. Smith had been following him for some time. That night he had seen the boy going toward the place where H had made an appointment with Smith. Two men had come out of an entrance and stabbed the boy about five minutes before I came up.

More than that he refused to tell. He did not know anything about the boy he had been following, he said.

I let him go and went up to where Dr. Roberts sat by the boy's bedside.

"Dangerous, but won't die," muttered the physician in answer to my question.

"Handsome boy, isn't he?"

"Boy,——! It's a girl."

I did not sleep that night. There was too much to be done. I wrote a note or two and used the telephone a few times. I had much better allies than the police could be. I could call upon men like George Barton, who was as dignified as a bishop and as strong as a Jap wrestler—and whose finger-prints were in every police station in the country; men like the mute Yang Li who was an artist with an eight-inch knife that had a blade like a razor.

The next morning Vivian, my wife, who had been visiting my sister, came home, bringing my nephew Rob. It required a little explaining to account for the presence of the wounded girl and her nurse, and for the blonde Bessie, who had stayed overnight. George had dismissed the servants after the coffee episode and had filled the house with some villainous-looking creatures who I knew were acquaintances of his, chosen against the time when I should have need for a strong bodyguard.

That night there came a telegram.

At nine o'clock there will be a shot through the window and you will need another statue on your mantel. Sooner than you expect a shot just as accurate will be aimed at you.

It was then twenty minutes of eight.

I VENTURED to my room up-stairs and inquired after the girl. Dr. Roberts had been there through the day, and Mrs. Morrison said that Jeanne was doing well. She had awakened and appeared in full possession of her faculties, but would tell nothing about herself. She asked questions, the natural questions, as to where she was and who was Mr. Richmond, but not even to Dr. Roberts would tell a thing. She was asleep then and I did not go into the room, but talked with the nurse in the hallway; she said that Mrs. Richmond had sent in some nightgowns and a boudoir cap for the girl, and that she had been very appreciative over these.

There was no telling what Vivian would do. Not the least—for, as I took the pains to find out, Vivian had sent them in before she had seen me and learned how the girl came to be in the house!

THE dinner we had that evening really should have taken place on a vaudeville stage. Vivian has periods when she is very strict about what she calls the "proper thing"; but in the flurry of her home-coming she had neglected to give orders or to inquire about the dinner. Under George's expert direction Black Mike undertook to assist at the table. His great hairy fists and blue-shaven chin, his general awkwardness and gunboat feet, made me think of some powerful animal being trained and exhibited. The floor was highly polished, but Mike was highly cautious and moved as if expecting the bottom to drop out of the room with each step.

When we went in Mike was standing very stiffly by the door and trying his best to look like an old servant from some baronial mansion. I am sure that George had had a good deal of fun out of torturing him with instructions. Mike tried to give me the faraway stare, but I said: "How are you, Mike?" and shook hands.

He said "Fine," and brought down his right eye in a screwed-up wink, as much as to say—

"Don't give me away, and I'll make these people think I used to flunkey for the King of Spain himself."

I can't go into the details of the dinner, and mention it only because of what happened before we left the table.

Bessie looked very different in a yellow frock that Vivian had provided, and she felt ill at ease as any one must have done. Rob, with his hair slacked back and plastered down, looking younger than ever, prattled away as inconsequently as a baby's rattle rolling down-stairs. Vivian was icily poised and polite. When she thought no one was looking and she could catch George's eye, she would stab him with glances.

Mike forgot his tutelage, and under

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the condemning eyes of both George and Vivian devoted himself almost exclusively to waiting on Bessie, addressing her with what to him was the politest possible manner; and she answered nervously, but pleased.

"Little more o' Adam's ale, miss? Fine, ain't it? Have another sinker? Aw, go'awn, have one. Lots more where dese come from."

And 'Frisco Frank had done himself proud: he had fried steak and onions in undreamed of profusion.

Vivian was speechless again.

But the joke of it was that steak smothered in onions was enjoyed by all of us, excepting herself. She looked from one to another. Rob was hungry. His was a healthy young appetite. Bessie was not prejudiced against fried onions. And I found the fare delicious.

Then a muffled report and the crash of falling statuary.

Mike, voicing a round and mighty oath, tore from the room; but he went out behind George who had not wasted the breath an oath required, but with incredible swiftness for one of his bulk, he had plunged kitchenward and out of the house in pursuit.

Every one at the table excepting myself jumped up.

"Has this become a lunatic asylum?" Vivian demanded.

I looked at my watch as I replied that I was afraid it would soon be one.

The shot promised for nine o'clock had been fired at 8:15. Gaboreau was cunning enough to slip forward the time, thinking to find us unprepared. No doubt somewhere in a hidden room, with a blanket wrapped around his withered legs and with watch in hand he was chuckling to think how he had outwitted the plans that I would have had ready at nine o'clock.

The three of them stood tense, waiting, not knowing what had happened or was likely to happen. For a moment they stood so. Then Rob dashed out, followed by Bessie. Vivian stared at me expectantly.

"You will find," I said, "that some one has knocked over 'The End of the Trail.' I expected it would happen and instructed George to tell you that it was the awkwardness of one of the new servants. But as usual when I lie I am found out. Vivian, Gaboreau has had some one shoot through the window just to show us that it could be done. George, with characteristic foresight, raised the window to save the pane. But now you know why I want you to go back to San Francisco and stay there until this is over——"

"I will not!" Vivian answered, as she flopped herself down into the chair, obviously symbolizing her determination to stick.

She was not at all curious as to the damage done.

"These servants," I went on, "are, as you saw when you first laid eyes on them, not servants at all, but fellows well known to George, and not unknown to me, whom he engaged as a sort of 'home guard.' I did not know anything of his plans. He did not expect you to come back. And, as you know, with Gaboreau on my hands, I have run counter to that mysterious H who will likely do what he can to make life unpleasant. Now will you——"

"I won't leave you again—never. No. Oh, Don, I am afraid," she cried impulsively, reaching her hands out to me. "I've never been afraid before—but now—I don't know. Is it nerves, Don? I feel like crying and I don't want to cry. I won't cry! So there! I want Gaboreau to leave you alone. He'd better leave you alone, or I'll—I'll—Don, I'll kill him myself!"

Tears were in her eyes even though she smiled, and she gripped my hands as though to crush them.

"I would like to be let alone, too," I told her. "But, sweet child, I am going through with this; and it would be ever so much easier if you would go back to——"

"Don't suggest that again. I'm not going!"

Rob thrust his head through the doorway and called for us to come and see what had happened. He was extremely excited and not unhappy: it was very nearly an adventure for him.

We went in. An expert marksman had fired the shot—no easy one, either. He had used a silencer, which smothers rather than silences the report, so as not to cause the attention of neighbors to be attracted.

THE district in which we lived is one of large homes and spacious lawns, and some of our neighbors went in for shrubs, apparently intent upon making their places into miniature parks.

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Nothing of the kind was around our house. There were few suitable hiding-places for prowlers on the premises. I did not know who any of our neighbors were, and I supposed they were as ignorant of us. The house on the same side of the street and to the north of us was some two hundred feet away and only a low hedge marked the division of lawns. It was built in the manner of a French château, with towers and turrets, and Vivian said that a retired banker lived there.

As our house was on a corner we had no other neighbors as close, for those across the street sat well back, and the "air of quiet respectability" was so pronounced that few pedestrians were ever seen. Occasionally a footman might be observed taking a poodle out for a walk. If the shot without the silencer had been fired I am sure that it would have scarcely made a stir of interest: it was such a "respectable" neighborhood it would have put it down to a blow-out.

I may be exaggerating, but I used to think the district so cold, so formal, that one neighbor would have resented it if another broke in unceremoniously to say the house was on fire. I often wondered what our neighbors would have thought if they were aware that a former professional gambler—who had not reformed—was in their midst. It may be that they did know and resented it.

"The End of the Trail" had been shattered. It required, as I have said, a good marksman to do it. I fancy that he came pretty close to the window, and that he did select the window that was raised—when there was one on each side of it that was not raised—showed that he appreciated George's consideration.

Vivian and I were both more silent than would probably be expected of two people under the circumstances; but we were both thinking of the same thing: how soon would a second shot be fired and with deadly intent? Gaboreau, I felt, was fiend enough to have her killed under my eyes. She was not thinking of herself.

Rob was excitedly demanding to know what had been done and why, and Bessie, pale and trembling with agitation, listened for an answer to his questions. Rob was another hostage to fortune that I might have to give. I did not want him around when events were so pressing. The ties of blood in me are not weak, though I have let my family rather severely alone; and, moreover, he was a likable young cub himself.

"I don't know what you think has happened," I said with intent to cool his excitement, "but the fellow who did this thought he was playing something of a practical joke. He even sent word that he was going to do it, and as much as said 'catch me at it if you can.' That is why George and Mike ran out as they did."

"You mean this is the way you and your friends play tricks on each other?" he asked surprised, doubtfully, but ready to believe if I affirmed it.

"No. I can't say that I ever played any such trick on a friend. Some people have a different sense of humor. I know who did it, and the first time I see him again I'll protest."

Vivian smiled wearily as she saw the disappointment on our nephew's boyish face. Relief came into Bessie's large blue eyes: she had the curiosity of her sex, and like honest women the world over, she had no love for blood. But almost every one else has. The normal youth is a bloodthirsty creature. For that matter few are not bloodthirsty creatures. Look at the crowds that swarm to a lynching; the mobs that swarm on the newsies when the papers give the grim details of a crime; the staring eyes that encircle every accident on the street.

George and Mike and 'Frisco Frank filed breathless and unceremoniously in upon us. Tony, his one eye blinking excitedly, brought up the rear. Frank was in a white chef's cap and apron and carried a butcher knife. As they grouped around us, tentatively permitting George to act as spokesman, I shook hands with Frank and Tony and somewhat relieved their embarrassment, but they had either heard or overheard Vivian's opinion of the "new servants" and looked at her nervously.

But Vivian was no longer the mistress concerned with the "proper thing" in servants: she would have done the next thing to laying down her life for them because they were there to defend me. That made so much difference that while George was trying to say that though they had looked high and low, they had seen no one, she interrupted him to ask me to introduce her. And she shook hands with

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each and smiled. After that I believe each would have laid down his life for her.

My wish was to get rid of everybody as soon as I could, for I thought it barely possible that Gaboreau had not succeeded as well as he expected and I wanted to investigate. I indicated by a glance to Vivian that I wished Bessie out of the way, and Vivian took her up-stairs so both of them were gone. Then I told Rob to go to his room and wait for me—to go to bed and read or something until I came.

I assured George and the others that they had done all that could be expected, and that I thought they could rest easy for the night. They all tried to talk at once for a few moments, explaining what they would have done had they caught the fellow and what they would like to do.

George waited until they were out of the room and asked if I had any instructions. I said that I supposed that he had often noticed the wax figures in shop windows.

He thought it a strange time to be jesting but warily admitted that he had.

"I am interested in wax work. It seems to me that its artistic possibilities have not been exhausted. Do you think so?"

A skeptical admission that perhaps they had not followed.

"The first thing tonight or tomorrow find out for me who makes those mannikins —makes the best ones. You might tell him that a favorite piece of statuary has been broken, and that I want something else to put in this room. Or tell him I want it for a practical joke. Tell him anything. Make an appointment for as soon as you can—here. Remember I want the best artist in that line that you can find, and that I want as little delay as possible. Understand?"

George said that he did, but showed slightly that he felt I ought not to leave him in the dark. I explained nothing. I rather enjoyed his mystification, and let him leave the room—though he went slowly, expecting every step that I would call him back.

When he was gone I glanced around, partly to see that no one else was left and partly to see somebody who should have been there. A paradox perhaps. But when I snapped my fingers twice a lithe body glided noislessly out into the light.

"Where is he?"

With rapid gestures Yang Li indicated the garage.

"Jerry is sitting on him?"

Yang nodded and a slight smile creased the corners of his thin lips.

"Turn out the lights and come."

YANG and I slipped out like thieves, leaving a house that had been plundered, and went to the garage.

The garage was a large one, or comparatively large, having been built to accommodate three cars, and the up-stairs was furnished for Jerry Kelly and his wife. Kelly was one of the few out-and-out crooks I have ever known to really reform—if being in my service could be called reformation. His wife did it for him, and she was one of the darlings of the earth. As Kelly phrased it, "she was the little girl that'd kept Judas from double-crossin' the Lord."

Yang and I went in and closed the door. Only one light was burning and the big place was dim. Overhead I could hear Mrs. Kelly bustling about, wholly unconscious of what was going on below and perhaps thinking that Jerry was tinkering with a machine. He had brought to motor mechanics all the delicate skill and swift perception that had made him an artistic burglar; though Jerry would have scornfully turned up his thick nose at that designation. He had not been a burglar. No. He had been a cracksman, if you please.

Jerry stood with his back to us, one foot on the running-board of Vivian's limousine, and glancing over his shoulder pointed toward a corner where I saw a man waiting like some trapped animal.

"He didn't have no gat, Mr. Everhard. Nothin'."

Vivian had repeatedly told him to address me as Mr. Richmond. She wished to forget and have forgotten the name which, perhaps, with a certain amount of egotism, I had taken unto myself when my family name became inconvenient.

It was an easy matter to throw a gun aside, I reflected, but by way of starting conversation I asked—

"What did you do with your gun?"

"What you mean, gun? I didn't have a gun. Just because I'm a burglar is no reason for carrying a gun."

That remark required a moment or two

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to think over. Here was a man with a voice and tone of inconcealable refinement, or perhaps it would be better to say of inconcealable education, not only trying to speak in a manner utterly foreign to him, but hastening to plead guilty to a charge that I had no intention of making against him. He seemed a little too anxious to assure me that he was a burglar.

"So you are a burglar?"

"I sure am. Call the police. I'll plead guilty."

"That's interesting. A rather remarkable burglar to be operating so early in the evening when the house is lighted and people are about."

"I was just looking the place over. I was going to wait until you had retired."

"'Retired?' Then why did you shoot through the window to alarm us?"

"Shoot through—" he stopped.

His amazement did not seem simulated.

"Come a little closer, under the light there. Now what did you start to say?"

"I don't know what you meant."

"No?"

"No."

"Where did Yang find you?"

"That Chinaman? Under a window. I was getting ready to climb in."

"I thought you said," I reminded him, "that you were looking the place over."

"That's right. But I saw the window up. It looked like a good chance to get in an' hide till everybody had gone to bed. The first thing I knew that Chink had a knife about three feet long under my chin. I didn't know it was possible to be so eloquent in the sign language. But I never missed a word—I mean what passed for words. I came right along, and here I am. Just call the police. I'll plead guilty."

He was a bit too anxious for the police. Under the light where I could inspect him closely, he looked even less like a burglar than he talked. I had not expected him to be a burglar. He did not look like one. He did not look at all like I expected he would. He was rather slender, well-groomed, intelligent, and not more than thirty-five.

"When you looked in at the window, you could not help but see the mantel across the room. Did you notice anything on the mantel?"

"Yes. The clock."

"Nothing else?"

"I don't remember. I noticed the clock. It was twenty-five minutes of eight. I remember that because I was wondering how long I would have to keep quiet before everybody went to bed. And the next minute the Chinaman put that knife at my windpipe."

"Jerry," I asked, "do you know exactly what time Yang brought him in here?"

"No, I don't, Mr. Everhard. 'Bout a half-hour ago I think."

I saw very clearly what had happened. I had told Yang to watch and bring to the garage anybody he saw around that window. Some one had been around before Gaboreau's man, and Yang caught him. The only other person who would be interested in trying to get into my house would be sent by H. He might wish to eavesdrop, or to go through what papers I had.

A real burglar would not have hastened to plead guilty; but one of H's emissaries would have no fear of going to jail. Bail would quickly be forthcoming. It was quite clear to me. I had set a trap for one fellow and caught another. I was almost as glad to have him, too.

"Your name?" I asked.

"Smith, John Smith," he answered glibly.

"Very well, Mr. Smith, just what information in particular did H tell you to get?"

That momentarily disconcerted him. He showed it. Few men can help showing a surprise. Anyway, I have paid some attention to the art of saying things in a way that disconcerts people. He recovered quickly. Some might have failed to notice all that I noticed; but he who has sat long at the green cloth learns to catch and to interpret the flicker of an eyelid, the slightest relaxation of the jaw, the quick tension of muscles around the shoulders and arms.

My eyes miss none of those things. Years ago I discovered that all involuntary actions are truthful. What I mean is that it is always a conscious effort to lie, either by word or act; and that the natural impulse, as reflected in muscular reaction, is to show, and to tell, the truth. Some people, particularly women, are consummate actors; but there are very few—other than women—who can stand in front of me and lie without my becoming aware of it.

Smith, as he called himself—it seemed to be a popular name with those in the

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employ of H—tried to make me think that he had never heard of H, but he overdid the part. He dwelt on it too long. He asked repeatedly what I meant, who was H, and what on earth made me associate him with a letter of the alphabet.

I said nothing. He was telling me much that I wanted to know, to wit: that H had sent him, and that he was very much disturbed because I had guessed so much.

I was in no mood for trifling. It had been some time since I had had sleep, and my disposition does not sweeten with a lack of rest.

"Smith," I said, "I can understand why you lie. In your fix I would do much the same, only I would do it more cleverly. Now you are in the employ of a German agent and this country is at war with Germany. You are either a spy or a traitor, and may be both. I do not intend to hand you over to Federal authorities, for at most they would only send you to a detention camp for the duration of the war. I do not care to bandy words with you.

"I may be as big a crook as you think, and Gaboreau may have all the interest in me that you assume; but I am a very devoted American and I am not at all squeamish with enemies of my country, especially when they are associated with personal enemies of my own. I am speaking at length because I do not intend to say anything more beyond asking you a few questions, and if you do not answer those questions—well, it will probably be quite unpleasant for you."

I wished to say something that would terrify him, but I can not bring myself with any spirit to threaten a defenseless man; and yet I believe I would have tortured that fellow. I never did actually torture anybody—I mean physically—but I was then in no mood to be trifled with, and he knew it.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Robert Henshaw," he replied in a low voice.

THEN I realized that it was not only my personality that had made him readily communicative, but the fearful reputation of Gaboreau. Henshaw—if that was his name, as I later had reason to doubt, though I continued to know and call him by it—thought I was one of Gaboreau's men; and he knew that Gaboreau did not scruple at the most ferocious torture.

"Who is H?" Then as he hesitated, I said: "He will never know that you have divulged anything—not unless you make it necessary for me to let him know."

Already I had a scheme for appropriating Mr. Henshaw to my own uses.

"He is a baron. I don't know who."

"Who are you?"

"I told you——"

"You told me your name. I mean who are you? How do you come to be associated with him?"

"I have been an agent for various Governments."

"Do you mean an international spy?"

"Yes. I was in the employ of Russia, stationed at Berlin when the war broke out. They gave me the option of being shot as a spy or entering the German service. They—the German secret service—didn't know exactly what I was doing there, but they had suspicions, and guessed right. They sent me to America. I posed as a British purchasing-agent—forged papers, of course—found out things about munition plants, shipments and all that sort of thing, and sent the information to Bernstorff.

"After he was sent home I was attached to H. I am telling you the truth. You have killed off three of our fellows in the last month, and I like my life too well to take chances after Gaboreau gets his hands on me! I would have cut loose from H a long time ago if I could. But he would have killed me; or if I went to Washington or any of the Ally embassies he would have discredited me in some way."

"Where is H to be found?"

"You have me there. I don't know. Nobody does."

"You get your orders over the telephone?"

"Or by appointment. I've met him lots of times. I've heard him addressed as baron. He told me to get into your house and find out what I could. Said you were close to Gaboreau. He intends to kill you. He told me so."

"But what did he want you to find out?"

"He wants to find out about the same thing you people do. He wants to know where Gaboreau hides out. Has a suspicion that it is here.

"What nationality are you?"

"American, I suppose. I was born here.

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My mother was Russian, my father a Swede, and never lived any place long. But they happened to be here in New York when I was born."

"Do you know anything of what took place here last night?"

"Not a thing."

"Do you know anything of the young man that was stabbed last night by H's crowd?"

"No."

"Do you know Leonore Musset?"

"Yes. She is clever and has a record—successful, I mean. She used to be in the Russian service, only she was in German pay all the time. I know H has her, but I don't know what he is using her for."

"Do you know another fellow who claims to be a Smith? A fellow with nobby features, a flat face, dull appearing—and appearances are not deceiving."

"No. You see it is this way. H has his organization, and I don't know how many people are in it. So far as I know, no one of those people is indispensable. If one of them is grabbed up or killed off, H simply shoves somebody else into that one's work. As long as he is not caught the organization goes along, and he takes good care not to be caught."

I waited some time before I said anything. There seemed to be nothing more that I cared to ask, excepting one thing; and I thought a little silence might precede that question by way of getting Mr. Henshaw's nerves taut.

Then I asked—

"What do you think I am going to do with you?"

"I don't know," he said. "But I have an idea that you will try to get me to help you to locate H. I'll do anything else, but not that. It would be suicide."

"And do you think that your suicide would trouble me?"

"No, I don't. But it would bother me a lot," he replied with a touch of grim humor.

"I would like your name and address and I do not think it will be well to try to deceive me. Here," I added, extending a pencil and a piece of paper, "write it down for me so there will be no mistake."

Wonderingly he wrote, and handed the pencil and notebook back.

Then I told Yang to go into the house and bring me some paper, a pen and ink from the library; and when he had brought them, I had Jerry improvise a writing-desk, and telling Mr. Henshaw to sit down, I ordered him to write as I dictated, and to write in his natural hand because if it did not correspond to the writing he had just placed in my notebook he would have it all to do over.

Then I dictated a letter which purported to have been written some weeks before by him to me in which he said that he was "still" trying to locate H, to discover his identity, and that he was writing this because he did not think it wise that we should have any more meetings, even though we continued to take the precautions as before.

In other words, I made it appear that he had for a long time been double-crossing H.

My acquaintance with international spies was decidedly limited, but I have always understood that they were extremely clever people; and I was taking the trouble to put Mr. Henshaw into an embarrassing situation. I did not believe that, should the occasion arise, he could possibly convince H that the letter was extorted or written under duress, and I intended to convert it into a sword of Damocles to hang over his head. He saw my purpose at once, and trembled a bit in the writing, but I did not care about that.

When he had finished and I had read carefully what he had written, I told him that he was free to go and to do whatever he pleased.

"You can keep in touch with me, or you can confess to H what has happened and tell him about this letter; in which case he will probably distrust you and arrange some way to make you uncomfortable. You can attempt to hide from both of us, and let both of us join in the search for you. His organization for keeping track of people is perhaps more comprehensive than any I might use, but I have always had pretty good luck when looking for people.

"I suggest that you play into my hand. I make no promises other than that I will do what I can to protect you, and people who know me best are not inclined to despise my assistance. You do not need to tell me now what your decision is, but go your way and think it over."

He was very much puzzled and he went his way wondering.

I was largely bluffing, but bluff merely

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consists in outguessing the one you are pitted against. He left me and had the opinion that I was likely to be a match for H. He thought I must have some trump cards up my sleeve of which he knew nothing. In fact, by leaving him to his imagination I had impressed him much more than if I had threatened or lied.

I WENT up to inquire again about Jeanne Latour. The nurse said that she had been rather delirious, or had seemed so, during the past two hours and continually talked in French. The nurse judged that it was French though she understood no word of it.

I asked if I might come in.

Jeanne looked very pale and weak. Her cheeks were flushed with fever which accentuated the pallor of her forehead. Her eyes, too, were bright with fever, and she stared at me suspiciously.

I asked if there was anything she wanted, and speaking in French she said—

"My uncle."

And then she went on rapidly to say that she must be taken to him at once, that he would worry, that he was an old man and helpless.

I asked her uncle's name and address, but instead of answering my question she flung a volley of questions at me. Who was I? How did she come to be where she was? How long had she been there? And I no sooner began trying to explain than the nurse interrupted and insisted that the patient was becoming too agitated, and could I not wait until some other time to finish the conversation.

So I went out. I wished to talk with Jeanne, but I could see that it was no time to get coherent words out of her.

I went up as I had promised to say good night to Rob, and found him still in a state of excitement. He had a thousand and one questions at his tongue's tip, but I did not have nearly so many answers, and I left him.

Then I went to Vivian. We were just beginning to talk when George rapped on the door.

He had another telegram, and he was expecting to slip it to me without Vivian seeing. But it fell from his fingers when he was trying to slip it back into his pocket as she came up to peer over my shoulder and listen. So there was nothing to do but to pick it up and hand it to me; and Vivian and I read it together. I might have found a way to keep it from her if I had really wished to, because I usually find a way to succeed in whatever I am determined on—whether it be a matter so small or something larger—but as I had already told her of Gaboreau I did not make the effort.

It was a very startling and one might almost say an embarrassing message coming after that demonstration with the statue, and read:

You will be dead inside of a week.—G.

Vivian remained silent, but she turned quite pale and I felt her hands tensely grip my arm.

George, who of course had read the telegram—or rather the faked telegram, for it was similar to the others—stood expectantly waiting for me to say something. I looked at him for a moment and said—

"That is all."

When he had gone and the door was closed, Vivian whispered, not daring to trust her voice:

"What does it mean, Don? How will he try to—to do it?"

"My dear, it appears as though he were trying to do it by fright. First he promised me six months of life during which I was to be agonized and tortured. Something seems to have changed his mind—unless such threats of sudden death as this are part of the torture he has devised."

I knew very well that the cunning old devil had every conceivable means of assassination to strike with, and perhaps I would be understating my feeling in the matter to say I was not concerned. I was. I was not greatly troubled, however. Of course, some people will think I am boasting because I do not admit that I felt a terrible anxiety, that my heart smote my ribs, and my tongue became parched, or that I had any other of those symptoms that agitate him who stands at the brink of death. Oh, well, all my life I have been misunderstood, but always by people who were not intimately acquainted with me.

My memory is fairly good, though in idle moments I have jotted down into notebooks various things that have happened and I recited a few instances, by way of cheering Vivian, to show that it was not the first time that the death-sentence had been pronounced.

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She extracted some satisfaction out of that, but not much. Gaboreau was of a different type from the others. They could be bluffed, out-faced, or if it came to that trial which means that some one must die they were at a disadvantage. I can shoot probably as quick as any man and I seldom miss. I am not what is called a gun-fighter, but all my life I have assiduously practised quick shooting. I have made it an art, a science, as men must who go into those places where split-seconds determine who shall live and who shall cease to live.

But Gaboreau was not as the others. I did not know where to find him, and he had a world of crime to recruit from. I was hedged about by a few recruits from the same domain, and they were loyal, desperate fellows, but all of us were required to be on the defensive, which is always a disadvantage and one that I do not willingly accept.

Vivian and I talked for some time. Then we went to bed, and I to sleep.

III

I AM a light sleeper, even when tired. And I opened my eyes at daylight and saw George coming through the door with a cup of black coffee. It was no use pointing out to him that, even when not tired, I like to sleep late. He has capabilities in insolence that baffle correction, chiefly because he is always impassive, bland—thereby being exceedingly deceptive.

George in anger, in a fight, is one of the quickest, most agile, men imaginable. And he sticks—not only sticks, but invites odds, and would not cry "enough" though cut to shreds, and would not yield though his chest were perforated as a sieve. I can forgive him anything: even awakening me at dawn.

"Mr. Ralston will be here at seven, sir. It is after six now," he whispered soundlessly.

I looked interrogatingly. I remembered no appointment with a Mr. Ralston. I knew no Mr. Ralston. And 6 A.M. is an unholy hour. I do not like to greet the dawn. Lying abed is a pleasure that I did not care to surrender for the dubious satisfaction of meeting one Mr. Ralston.

"He is in the designing department of the Form and Fashion Wax Company."

Then I understood. George, with that promptness and persistency that would make him invaluable to anybody, had telephoned and telephoned the night before, getting irate strangers even out of bed until he finally located some one connected with a mannikin manufacturing company, and by suggesting to Mr. Ralston that he could secure an important and profitable order, had made the appointment for seven o'clock. Of course, George placed it at that hour maliciously. He knew, none better, my aversion to early rising.

But though Mr. Ralston was prompt, it was I who waited for him—yes, I kept him waiting a few minutes, for Dr. Roberts came in before him.

The doctor said that Mrs. Morrison telephoned that the girl had a high fever and was delirious.

Dr. Roberts went to the patient and I went into the library to Mr. Ralston. I told him in very few words what I wanted, and that he could name his own price. I doubled his price on the condition that my order would be filled by noon on the next day. He agreed, and at once proceeded to take measurements, as though I were being fitted for a new suit; then, as if to show me what a swift and skilful artist he was, he put on to a paper a very good likeness of myself in a remarkably short time.

He said that the order was unusual, but that he would guarantee satisfaction, and, moreover, he would guarantee that it would take more than a casual glance to distinguish that it was a wax figure and not myself.

I was rather incredulous at that, but he was enthusiastic and went his way promising to have the delivery made promptly.

An hour later Dr. Roberts told me that the girl's condition was serious, and that he thought her delirium had been brought on by mental agitation rather than as a direct result of her injuries. I asked if there was any possible chance of getting her to be rational enough to give me her uncle's address.

"Not in the world. No. Maybe in two days. One at least. You had no business to bring her here."

"I should have left her in the street?" I asked softly.

"No. No. Of course not. But if she dies the police will ask questions."

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"And when I am reported to be on my death-bed I shall expect you to keep the police from asking questions."

He looked at me curiously.

"What the devil do you mean?" he asked. "You getting out of your head, too?"

"Not at all. I expect to be shot at, or something, in the next few days; and I may need your attention. I won't want the police to know, but I will want some one else to think that the shot has been fatal, or the next thing to it. So you can give me pneumonia, or heart-trouble—anything. And we must have your statement of my condition in the newspapers even if we have to pay for it."

"Won't do it. No. Won't. Something queer about you, sir. You don't like the police. That girl—is it because of her?"

"Hardly. And I think you will do it when the time comes. I am sure you will."

"Trying to coerce me, sir? I won't be coerced. Who's going to shoot at you? Sounds funny."

"I don't know. But perhaps it will be the same one who will shoot at you when he discovers that you have exaggerated my condition. Then you can investigate, and ask the police to help."

"Police, humph. What's the trouble?"

I told him of the German spies, of Gaboreau, and of the wax figure, and he grew quite enthusiastic over the idea, but almost pessimistically expressed the opinion that we would not have the good luck—as he called it—to have assassination attempted.

"You do not know Gaboreau," I said, emphasizing the fact that there was a difference between knowing of him and knowing him.

THE day passed quietly and nothing of unusual interest happened except the very peculiar telephone conversation that I had with Mr. Henshaw. I do not care to talk much over the telephone. I prefer to talk to men whose eyes I can see; but nevertheless I listened to him with a degree of interest.

He called up early in the afternoon and after assuring himself that I was the party he wanted, said that he was "in a frying-pan with the devil sitting on the lid."

"An interesting condition," I told him.

"I've found out something about you that I didn't know last night," he said.

I waited expectantly.

"I heard that man call you 'Everhard.' Well, I have made some inquiries." A pause. "And I'm going to be on the square with you."

"I am glad."

"Yes, but listen. I didn't know about you until after I had made my report to the party we both have in mind. The one with the name that an Englishman always drops. I didn't tell him much except that you were one of G.'s big men. I thought you were. He not only thinks so, but he has a hunch that G. himself is living there with you. He said that two of his agents had succeeded in getting inside the house. Was trying to rub it in on me because I told him that the best I had been able to do was to listen through the window and talk with some servants.

"Naturally I gave him the report that he wanted to hear. That's one of the first things you learn in the German secret service. I'm talking from a booth and he hasn't got control of the telephone exchanges—yet. He loosened up and talked to me more than he ever has. In fact, he is feeling rather joyous and confident, and I've made too many reports to Potsdam to ever let the truth interfere with what those who are listening want to hear."

"Are you sure that you are not making the same kind of a report to me?" I asked, surmising what he was going to say from the way he had begun the conversation.

"No. No. I dropped into a police station and pretended to be a reporter, and by adroit questions found out something about one Mr. Donald Everhard. He doesn't know. Calls you Richmond. Well, Mr. Everhard, I just want to tell you to look out for him. You see, I wasn't so very afraid of that letter you made me write because I figured that he would never see it. Didn't believe that you could get in touch with him. I don't know. You see, I know how well he hides. But I am with you—as far as you will let me be."

"Why this sudden change of heart?"

"Well, for one thing I prefer to be on the winning side."

"You mean that you think Gaboreau will win?"

" 'Gaboreau' is right. H thinks Gaboreau lives with you. I have a better idea than that. I have sized up the situation pretty well."

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"And——"

"Do you want me to be frank with you?"

"Yes."

"Then listen. You are Gaboreau!"

I took a few seconds to think that over, then inquired—

"Is that what the police led you to believe?"

"No, but I wasn't born yesterday."

"So I perceive."

"I've had experience in finding out things that weren't obvious, and I have put two and two together."

"I would be interested to know just how you arrived at that conclusion. As you know, there is always a big place in the world for a clever man, and even I might have some use for one who could make accurate deductions from material so slight."

I could tell even over the telephone that Mr. Henshaw took the compliment to himself with open arms.

"Well, here's exactly how I doped it out. This Gaboreau is a name—nothing more. Almost everybody has heard of him, but who has seen him? Nobody claims to. He is supposed to do desperate things, and to have a gang of experts in his organization. Who is the man that has the reputation for doing things just as desperate as Gaboreau, that everybody seems to know, and has seen? One Donald Everhard. And who has a few competent fellows around him ready to grab anybody indiscreet enough to look through the window?

"You had no way of knowing that I was coming, yet that Chinaman was ready for me. Some people that fear burglars have watchmen, but not a Chinaman with a long knife. Who has a deadly feud with H? Who picked up the boy that Gaboreau is thought to have been interested in and took him home? Get me?"

"Yes. Very shrewd deductions—in a way. But you must have heard from the detectives that I——"

"I was coming to that myself. Listen. Some months ago you were supposed to have had a quarrel with Gaboreau. Yes. I heard all about it. The police were on Gaboreau's trail when you stepped in. What happened? The house Gaboreau was supposed to have lived in was blown up and burned. Now if Gaboreau did live in that house, and was in it at the time, he was killed—but if you wished to make the police quit looking for Gaboreau, lest if they looked long enough they might find more than you wished, I don't know how you could have gone at it any more neatly than you did.

"That is brainy work. You pretend to hunt Gaboreau down, burn his house, and what happens? You are in right with the police, and your Gaboreau identity is effectively hidden. Then what happens? A few months later Gaboreau starts work again. Wasn't killed at all. But nobody would suspect Mr. Donald Everhard."

"Your reasoning is truly remarkable," I said. "But do you happen to know that it is rather dangerous to be talking as you are over the telephone."

"I know it, but you told me to cut loose. Anyway, the chances of central having time to listen are slim. I've studied that end of telephoning pretty well. We international agents have to study details. The only thing you have to watch out for is if they let a stenographer cut in on all your telephone calls, and they only do that with parties the police suspect. And nobody would suspect you. You have seen to that."

"But you did," I reminded him.

"Oh, well, I've made my living for some years by using my head."

"So I perceive. And now, Mr. Henshaw, if you want to really win my confidence, you find out two things for me. One is, how on earth H ever discovered—or what reasons he had for thinking—that Gaboreau was interested in that boy some of your people tried to murder. The other is, where I can meet H. I want to talk over a few little things with him."

"Want an armistice?" he asked in a surprised and slightly disappointed voice.

"I prefer to explain to H personally. You have made some very surprising deductions, but the men I have use for are those that make something more than deductions. Good-by."

I hung up. I did not feel that any information Mr. Henshaw would procure could be depended on; and I wondered how H managed to accomplish anything if he was so badly served—but I had an impression that Henshaw was talking to me while H himself stood by and listened.

I reflected on the strange tangle that had brought about Henshaw's suspicion. Miss

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Musset had told her tale of wo to H, and H had delegated Henshaw to investigate me under suspicion that I was connected with Gaboreau, or might possibly be Gaboreau himself. I remembered that Jerry in Henshaw's presence in the garage, had called me "Mr. Everhard." Henshaw had heard and remembered, and made inquiries concerning that name.

Finding that I had been more or less at swords' points with Gaboreau, he made the brilliant guess that I had used a double identity and to deflect all possible suspicion of my being the criminal Gaboreau, that I had posed as his Nemesis. Mr. Henshaw seemed very clever at guessing. The only thing that impaired his unusual faculty was that he did not guess correctly.

AS I have said, the day passed quietly, but several things happened before the night was over. For one thing, Rob had an adventure. For another, I came near killing Black Mike. For still another—but I might as well begin with Black Mike for it is very quickly told.

I always have had a habit of wandering around any house with which I am familiar without switching on the lights. I do not think it is timidity that causes me to prefer the darkness, for if I must have light I prefer it as dim as possible. This was early in the evening, but owing to the disturbed condition of our household we did not have dinner. One very good reason was that Frisco Frank was half-drunk, and, though unable himself to cook, he let Tony and even George know that he would not have any bunglers and amateurs monkeying around in his kitchen.

If Vivian had interested herself at all in the dinner I might have had a few words with Frank, whose evil temper was merely the flaw in an otherwise good enough fellow. Tony, with Latin vociferousness, protested; but Frank was obdurate. The odor of garlic would not be permitted to desecrate his kitchen. So they wrangled heartily and drank together from the same bottle.

It was about nine o'clock. Jerry, driving Vivian's car, had taken her and Rob for a little fresh air. Yang, having been cut off from the closet by the use to which my room was put in nursing the delirious girl, had tucked himself away in some unknown corner, and George was doing something in the basement. It was George's boast that the basement was fixed up as a modern jail should be. He had been with me long enough to know that I sometimes had use for a jail, a private jail.

I came out of the living-room, crossed the hall and started into the library. No lights were on. I heard the slightest of movements across the room near the window.

"Who's there? Quick," I said.

A second passed without an answer.

I shot.

I had heard nothing more than the faintest sounds to sight by, but I have what amounts to an instinctive accuracy with a gun. It was not wrought up nerves that made me hasty. When in doubt, I shoot and shoot first. This was one of the few mistakes I have ever made.

A woman screamed out that I had killed Mike, even as a man cried—

"It's only me!"

I pressed a button. As the light came on Yang appeared from out the nowhere at my elbow.

Bessie was holding, half-supporting and half-clinging to, Black Mike, who stood weakly gripping the divan.

I would have given much to have been able to recall that bullet to its empty chamber.

What had happened, as I learned from Bessie's hysterical lips and from Mike's grim ones, for he was something of a stoic, was that they, wishing to be alone, had gone into the library, not thinking that any one would find them. They felt that they had no right there—as though I cared when they came there or how long they stayed. Mike, as well as Bessie, was somewhat awed by the house, or rather by its furniture. Mike, taking the rôle of a servant, knew that servants were not supposed to do their wooing in the library, and it was that feeling of guilt that had caused him to be slow in replying to me.

I was more troubled than I tried to put into words. I had felt from the moment she accepted that invitation that it was a mistake to have Bessie. She had had no part, no place in my scheme of things; and it was only a kind of pity for the poor little good-hearted girl that had caused me to let her stay.

Mike was hit in the chest. It was a bad

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wound, for my automatics are of a large caliber and the bullets soft-nosed.

Yang and I lifted him to the divan and I had started to reach for the telephone when I saw the white face of the nurse who had ran down-stairs at the report of the gun. I asked her to call up Dr. Roberts.

George, too, came, calm, imperturbable, and looked inquiringly at me from his large owlish eyes. I felt as nearly miserable as I have ever been in my life. Bessie looked at me silently, reproachfully. Mike, with the grim stoicism of the criminal class—wherein one may find fatalists and only there one may find them—made no sign, and said no word, though repeatedly his lips twitched in the effort to keep back all expression of pain. Words do not come fluently from my tongue at such a time as this, and I could say nothing; but I pressed his hand in an effort to convey all that I wished to say.

"It's all right, Mr. Everhard. I ain't a-goin' to croak, an' if I do—what's the dif?"

There was a great deal of "difference," for though I really did not know Mike in the sense that ours was a long acquaintance, I knew that his was a loyal breed and that he had come into the house to help me and ask no questions. I would not send him out again—not even to a hospital.

Mrs. Morrison, the nurse, eyed me apprehensively, for she had learned how the accident came about, and she seemed to be one of those persons who are congenitally suspicious and naturally thought there was something behind the accident. She complained that her patient up-stairs needed her when I told her to examine Mike and do what she could. I told her the patient up-stairs could wait, and that if her condition had not been too serious for the nurse to investigate the report of a gun it was not too serious for the nurse to dress the person shot. I am fortunate in having people understand when I am in earnest. It saves argument. Mrs. Morrison did as I told her without further words.

I sent George up-stairs to make ready a room, but I thought it best to leave Mike on the divan until the doctor came.

Dr. Roberts snorted and grumbled when he saw the wounded man and heard what I had to say. He growled that it would be bad for us all if the man died and no report had been made. He said that it was queer that so many people around me were getting hurt. I paid no attention to what he had to say, and interrupted to ask how serious was the wound.

"Knock a hole in your own chest and tear a piece out of the lung," he replied shortly, "and you'll know."

"Perhaps we had better call in another doctor," I remarked, and he flared up as I had expected.

"And have him go blurt out all he finds to the police! You must be crazy. I may be unethical and foolish—but all doctors don't keep their eyes shut to crooked work!"

He did not mean that any more than he had meant the other. He was much like many men I have met, George in particular, who go to a good deal of trouble to say things that will conceal what they mean. George pretended to be ignorant Dr. Roberts pretended to be antagonistic.

MIKE was just being carried up-stairs when the door bell rang. I answered it. Vivian and Rob met me.

"What's the matter with that lock of yours anyway?" Rob demanded. "Or did you give me the wrong latch key? It doesn't work."

"Doesn't it?" I asked. "Let me see."

I saw at once that it was the right key. I saw also that the lock had been skilfully tampered with. But I said nothing. I pretended that I had given Rob the wrong key. There was no reason to excite him and Vivian. Besides, I knew that their nerves would have a severe shock when they heard what had happened to Mike.

"I'm hungry as a cannibal that's dined on a vegetarian," Rob said. "Feel like eating now, Vivian?"

She said that she did not, and gave me a rather strange glance as she told Rob to go into the pantry and find whatever he could for himself.

As he went out she asked:

"Why did you try to make me think that was the wrong key? What is the matter? Don't you suppose I know the key to my own house?"

"I don't want any one to know that we know the lock has been tampered with. That is why. It is not that I do not trust you. You know that. But long ago I formed the habit of keeping to myself

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things which I did not wish to become known. The lock has not been forced. It has had a small piece of metal inserted so the key will not fit. That is queer. I want to await developments instead of having the lock fixed. But principally I did not want you or Rob to know, because there has been enough happening to excite you both. I accidentally shot Mike. He is up-stairs now with the doctor."

She stared at me for a few seconds.

"Don, why do you tell me that? You never accidentally shot anybody in your life. You couldn't. What was Mike up to?"

I explained briefly, and with tears of worry in her eyes she hurried up the stairs.

I sat down to think about the lock. No one had been trying to get in. And any one must have known that as soon as the key was found not to fit the doorbell would be rung and the door opened, and the lock found to be out of order. I could not imagine what any one hoped to gain.

But I did not have time long to reflect on the question.

Rob dashed in upon me with his eyes wide-staring, his hands lifted in horror, and he gasped hoarsely:

"The kitchen's full of dead men! And blood—every place!"

"Yes?" I asked quietly, looking at him hard and reading in his pale youthful face the confirmation of his gruesome message.

"It's horrible! I started in the kitchen to make some tea—stumbled over one—and there was another. Shall I 'phone the police?"

And he turned toward the telephone.

"Wait. Are you sure you haven't mistaken two drunken men and a broken bottle of claret for a tragedy?"

He threw his hands high in a horrified protest at the idea.

"Well, then it may be as you think. But remember this, Rob, do not get excited because a situation is serious. It is all right to have hysterics, like women do, over a mouse. But murder—that is something to try the foundation of your heart."

Many, if not most people try to live up to dramatic situations by imitating what they think is proper horror. If it were not that people are expected to throw up their hands and shriek when they come upon a dead man I do not believe that they would do it. To bear evil news gives one a kind of license to act dramatic: witness anybody telling the story of a violent tragedy they have seen. Such people are excited by the thought that they are exciting others.

Perhaps I exaggerate in Rob's case. He was only a boy. And certainly he bore evil news. I remembered, even before I had arisen from the chair, that neither Tony, nor Frank, nor the young helper had been attracted by the shot that rang through the house. I had not thought of that before.

We went into the kitchen. Rob had had some justification for his excitement. I have seldom seen more of a shambles. Blood was every place and three dead men were on the floor: Tony, Frank and the boy whose name I did not know. There had been no fight. They had been butchered. All of them had perhaps been drunk. Certainly they had been drinking. And some people wonder why all my life I have never drank anything stronger than ginger ale!

It was evident that somebody had come into the house intending to kill as many as he could. Perhaps there had been two or three assassins. Evidently the effort had been made to exterminate my household.

Gaboreau or H—which?

I will not go into details of what I found. A knife had been at the throat of each and the blood ran in pools, red pools, like devil's mirrors on the floor.

What had happened? The men had been dead for some time. Their bodies were cold, already stiffening. Why had those three been killed? Obviously to get rid of people who might help me. Of course, my first flush of suspicion was directed at Gaboreau; but Gaboreau was not a wanton murderer. He killed quickly enough, and he had no compunctions against killing innocent men, but he would not have stopped to kill in piecemeal. It would have been more like Gaboreau to have put a bomb under my house and have blown us all into the air, then have used a knife on those who came down alive.

I had gathered from Henshaw that Gaboreau and H waged continually a guerilla warfare on each other. The wounded girl, in whom Gaboreau was said to be interested, was an instance of this. So perhaps H, thinking that I was leagued

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with Gaboreau, had had these poor fellows killed off by way of reprisal. Would they, I asked myself, have been likely to stop there if they had not been frightened away?

The back kitchen door was not only unlocked, but open. Any one could have entered during the past hour or more. Perhaps there was some one now hiding in the house.

I told Rob to say nothing to any one, but to go find Yang Li and bring him to me. I had no sooner said that than Yang Li shuffled noiselessly through the doorway, outside of which he had been listening. It was almost uncanny to have him appear that way—more like a jinnee summoned out of the thin air by incantation at the mention of his name. His thin, wrinkled, parchment-like face did not register the faintest emotion; his eyes were steady and blank as jewels set in a stone idol.

I have a trace of superstition in me, as all men do who have gambled, but I would not believe that there was anything "magical" about Yang Li; yet the very fact that I set myself not to believe it shows that the impression was present and persisted. I told him to search the house, and making the curious salutation with which he replied to all instructions he faded away. I say "faded away" because I listened for his footfall even as I watched him withdraw, and I did not hear it; and he went out backward, swiftly but without a trace of haste.

It was a relief to know that when Yang had finished there would be no one in the house who did not have a right there.

WHAT follows may seem offensive, even heartless, to many people. But supposing I had called the police. They would have removed the bodies to the morgue and pried around for clues, turned my household upside down, been suspicious and asked accusatory questions of me, of Vivian, of Rob and every one else. That Gaboreau and H operated under their noses showed how little the police hindered them, and this latest crime would only have made a newspaper sensation.

If I had believed the police would be of assistance I would not have hesitated a moment, but though they are indispensable to the peace and safety of nervous maiden women and stout merchants, I have always taken care of those affairs that affected me without calling upon policemen who, after all, are only a mercenary legion financed by citizens that feel they have neither the time nor the ability to take care of themselves.

I did not intend to cheat the police. They should have the bodies at the morgue, and they could pry around to their hearts content for clues. It is no easy matter to dispose of such a thing as a dead man's body; and there were three on my hands. I had no wish to hide them. I intended that they should have a funeral the like of which they had never dreamed of having. I intended that friends, and perhaps relatives, if they had any, should be present, and in due time I saw that it was arranged for and advanced the funds—but all that is outside of this story.

I sent Rob for George, and instructed him not to say a word of what had happened—not to say one word then or later. Rob was bursting with the desire to talk. The impulse to burst in upon Vivian with the grim recital was strong in him; and natural, too. This impulse to tell things seems to be, by what biological progression I know not, deeply implanted in mankind.

George came and saw, and his mask-like face did not change except at the mouth, where the lines grew sad and stern. Terrible emotions could surge unsuspected beneath his placid exterior like the rushing currents that swirl in the deep channels of the ocean that shows a becalmed surface. I knew that George's vengeance was a fearful thing; the more fearful because he did not lash himself into a futile rage.

He asked who did it; and I told him either Gaboreau or H, which he knew already. Then I explained that I did not wish the police to know.

He understood, though Rob stood staring from my face to George's and back again to mine as though trying to discern the inaudible language with which we seemed to communicate.

George went out and came back with three blankets, and I cut the laundry tag from one. The others were new.

I sent for Jerry, and Jerry voiced all that George felt in saying furiously—

"I'd like to get my hands on 'em for just ten seconds!"

I told Jerry to take off the number plates from the limousine and put on those which

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he had taken from a wrecked car some months previously and kept for some such emergency.

Each of the bodies was wrapped in a blanket and carried out to the limousine where an improvised stretcher was arranged, and they were laid on that. Then George and Rob and Jerry set about removing the stains on the kitchen floor.

I went to Vivian, talked with her a few minutes lest she grow nervous and begin looking for me, assured her that there was nothing to worry over, and very nearly convinced her that it was so—or it may be that she merely pretended to be nearly convinced in order to comfort me.

I stopped to ask after Mike, and found Bessie by the bed holding his hands, and Dr. Roberts sitting in a chair and half-dozing. He came into the hall with me and protested that he had not been dozing at all, but watching the eternal motherhood of her sex come out in even such a woman as Bessie.

"It's the vanity of women that gets men into trouble. It's their tenderness that lures them out of the coffin. God's paradox. Women damn us and save us. Wasn't over a woman you shot him, was it?"

I looked at him, and he saw that his levity had carried him a step too far, and with just a trace of confusion hurried on to say that Jeanne Latour was in a deep sleep, the crisis past, and when she awakened he believed that she would be on the high road to recovery; taking the precaution however to add—

"You never can tell though."

I went with him to the door and took the time to glance at the lock again. No further tampering had been done.

Yang was waiting for me at the foot of the stairs when I returned. He had found no one. I left him on watch and went to the kitchen where the three men in shirt-sleeves were just finishing mopping the floor with steaming water. Rob was very pale and nervous.

"Perhaps you had better go up to your room and to bed," I suggested.

"No," he said stubbornly. "I'm going too. I don't know where. But I am going with you."

"You would be better not to go. It will be unpleasant and uninteresting."

"No. I am going."

In overcoats and with caps pulled low—four muffled figures—we went silently to the garage. The blanketed forms lay from seat to seat. They had been carefully wrapped, carefully, almost tenderly carried to their place, for something of the ministration that one instinctively bestows upon the dead had been present in the attention given.

Two of them had lived hard, reckless lives; the third was only a boy, but no doubt stained with crime. But once the finger of death is laid on the human form it becomes in a way consecrated, voices are lowered in its presence, the hands that touch it are gentle. And I could not forget, nor did I wish to, that it was for me they had died. True enough they had been cut down in a drunken stupor, but had they been sober, wage-earning and respectable citizens they would not so generously have thrown their lives between me and what enemies I might have.

I sat beside those bodies and I put out a hand and touched one—symbolically laying my hand upon the heart of each—and I silently swore an oath that marked certain unknown men for death.

Rob sat on the seat with Jerry, and George and I were inside.

The driveway to the street inclines slightly, and throwing out the clutch George noiselessly slipped from the garage.

I had told Jerry to drive down into the warehouse district, for I knew that it would be about the most deserted place in the city; and my intention was to leave the bodies in the shelter of some entrance way and anonymously notify the police where they could be found.

We had driven perhaps twenty minutes when Jerry through the tube said:

"Mr. Everhard, we're bein' followed. I've turned corners three times an' that car back there hangs on."

I looked behind. A half block away I could see a car coming on.

We drove for some time and the car kept about the same distance.

I knew it must be either Gaboreau or H; and I was confident that it was not Gaboreau's men. As I have said, he knew where to find me, and he was not the sort of a man who would spend time tracking and watching one that had made no more of an effort to hide than I. That Gaboreau intended to kill me some time, I had not the slightest doubt. But he was a man of prodigious

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intellect, and understood as few men can the refinement of cruelty. He wished to harass and worry me, to threaten and terrify and drive me into a panic.

"Turn a few more corners, Jerry," I told him, and went on thinking.

I had laid myself wide open to the hostility of the German terrorist by pretending to be allied with Gaboreau, when he and H were at war. How those two could have a deadly feud, I could not imagine. Gangs are often in feuds; but it seemed to me that one commissioned by the German Government to spread destruction in America would have sufficient to do in evading and combating the Secret Service, without staining his knife in the blood of Gaboreau's men.

"They're hangin' on," Jerry said.

Now no matter who they were, they were setting about in the prescribed way to get into trouble.

"Drive fast for two or three blocks, then turn a corner and stop short, and they will be on top of us before they know it."

I looked at my watch. It was a quarter past twelve.

Instantly our car leaped forward. Jerry whirled along for four or five blocks until he came to a corner with a building that would suitably screen our stop after the turn; then he wheeled in a way that nearly upset the car and jammed on the brakes so quickly as almost to throw me through the window.

I hurriedly got out and was standing in the middle of the street when the other car cut the corner. Precisely the thing happened that I expected would happen. In his surprise at coming upon us, the driver attempted to stop short instead of continuing on at full speed and escaping. He realized his mistake almost at once, and started up again ready to run me down.

Things happened very quickly then. I did not want to kill anybody, but I wanted to find out who was in the car and what they were about.

Instantly both my automatics were working. I shot the two front tires and sent a stream of lead into the hood of the engine.

Somebody from the back of the car opened fire on me. He was a very poor shot. I would have replied, but I saw the party with him strike up the gun and heard him cursed as a fool.

The chauffeur leaped from his seat and was bounding away, but as I advanced to the machine I had a glimpse of him being almost hurled into the air as George's powerful arms came within reach.

We had to work fast for I knew that from all directions there would be people and cars swarming, though the district was pretty well deserted at night. But in far less time than it takes to speak of it, I had the two parties in the back of the car out, and covering the three of them, which included the chauffeur that George had caught, I told Jerry and George and Rob to carry the three blanketed bodies to the wrecked machine. It was the work of split seconds to do that; and as the bodies went out, I waved the prisoners into my car.

George sprang back into our car, Rob and Jerry bounded to the seat; the starter whirled and the motor began to throb as a policeman rounded the corner crying halt and shooting as he peered ahead to glimpse our number.

I would not have cared to be a mark much longer for him, for he shot three times and every bullet crashed into the car; which, I reflected ruefully—for it was Vivian's—would necessitate the car being kept out of use until all excitement over the incident had died down and I could think of some plausible explanation for having bullet-marks obliterated. In the meantime, putty, lacquered and polished would have to serve.

We got safely away, and Jerry drove furiously for several minutes, then putting out the lights drew up to a curb and again changed the number plates. After which we continued leisurely on our way home.

I said nothing to the three men we had captured, but I looked at them intently and with interest.

Henshaw was one of them. "Bad Bill" Condon was another.

THOSE who know me, and those who know of me as well, are aware that when the trail is hot I do not stop to light a camp-fire. I keep going day and night. In fact, I lose all accounting of time. I do not know how long I could go without sleep, but I fancy it is longer than most people would believe.

When we drove into the garage Vivian heard the machine, and her head appeared

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at the window. As I stepped out she called—

"Don?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know you were out. What is wrong?"

"Not a thing. Just a breath of fresh air. I'll be up in a few minutes."

When she had withdrawn her head I told George and Jerry to take our "friends" to the quarters reserved for unexpected guests. Condon was the chauffeur I had overhauled the night I commandeered a car to bring Jeanne Latour to the house, and he had been in the basement before, but also had been too drunk to know about it.

Rob came into the light and I saw that he was shaking like a leaf in the breeze, but his mouth was set resolutely. His face seemed to me to be all eyes and they were feverishly bright. Excitement was something new to him, excitement of that kind, and any one could have seen that not the least of his astonishment was due to the matter-of-fact way in which George, Jerry and I regarded the happenings.

I asked him to come with me, and inside the house I suggested that he go to bed, as nothing more of interest would happen.

"Not much I won't!" he replied bluntly, using the large liberty of youth and kinship. "That's what you said before—and I wouldn't have missed tonight for a million dollars! Not two million! Think the police'll catch us?"

"No. The police do not annoy honest men—if they are careful."

"I was scared stiff," he said frankly. "Everybody shooting and jumping—Lord, I wouldn't have missed that! It was my first adventure, real adventure I mean. Do you think I am a coward?"

"Coward? There is no such thing as a coward. Some day you will understand that. Some people are imaginative and some are not. That is all. Now go down to the basement, take a chair, doze off if you feel like it, and listen to as much as you want to hear. But remember not to say anything to Vivian."

He hurried toward the basement as though afraid something interesting would happen before he got there.

As I turned, Yang Li, apparently having risen out of the floor, was in front of me.

"All quiet?" I asked him.

He barely shook his head and raised a finger, looked intently toward the window for a moment as though watching and listening, then turned his eyes again on to me.

"Some one prowling about?"

He nodded.

"Hear them?"

A shake of the head.

"See them?"

He nodded.

"How many?"

Again the finger was raised.

"If you see him again go after him."

Yang drew a finger slowly across his throat.

"Yes," I said, "if necessary."

I went to Vivian. She was in a violet dressing-gown, with her long dark hair down, and curled up in a chair fingering a magazine.

"At last! Kiss me, Don. Why did you go out without telling me. The night air—you will catch cold. No. Kiss me right—as though you meant it. I was frightened to death a while ago. I wish you would get rid of that Chinaman! I was hungry and started down to the pantry. I was on the stairs when Yang leaped—Don he leaped half-way across the hall and stood by the window as though turned to stone, and I never heard a sound! I saw him jump and listened for the thump when he would land, and I never heard it. I turned and ran back.

"He is not right—insane and—I don't know, but it isn't human not to make a noise—when you jump. And tonight he went into your room where that nurse and girl are and looked all about. Mrs. Morrison tried to keep him out, but he just pushed by her. She told me she thought we had better get some one else tomorrow. What business did he have there anyway?"

"I told him to search the house."

"Why? You don't think there is anybody in the house, do you?"

"No. I know there isn't. Yang has said so."

"Why are you so devoted to that fellow? He never does anything but just dart around like a shadow."

"Vivian, Yang can go and carry a knife where a shadow's footfall would be heard. You have never seen him asleep. Neither have I. Neither of us has ever seen him eat. Yet he is as strong as steel wire. He would follow me any place and stick. He

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was born with more cunning than a white man can ever acquire——"

"He doesn't obey orders," she said petulantly. "I told him to follow you—not to let you out of his sight. And he didn't. He promised, too."

"Like a good soldier he obeys his last order first. I told him to stay here."

"Well, tomorrow," she said, taking me by the hair and pulling my face down to her lips, "I'll tell him every minute of the day to follow you. Then there won't be any misunderstanding. Coming to bed now?"

"Not right away. We're holding a little council of war down-stairs."

"Don, if Mike dies I don't know what that poor girl will do. She was up here and cried for an hour tonight. She says she always brings people bad luck. I told her all women did. But she insisted that if anybody ever liked her or was good to her they suffered for it. The doctor said she would be as good as any other nurse—better. She didn't understand at all what he meant. So I gave her my lavender frock, stockings, pumps and that yellow and black brooch—it will go wonderfully well with her yellow hair, even if it is bobbed—and told her to wear them tomorrow when she gave Mike his medicine.

"A thing she couldn't understand was that Mike insisted that he was lucky—lucky to be alive at all. Poor girl, I did not tell her that Mike knows how frightfully well you shoot. And Don, do be careful! It seems to me those horrid guns of yours are always going off."

"You know better than that."

"I don't. I wouldn't admit it if I did. I hate those guns. Yang Li with his knife. You with your guns. I with my hatpins! And that awful gang of ruffians——"

"Friends."

"Ruffians that George brought in here as servants. Why can't you keep out of trouble. Other men are not always into it. If you hadn't brought that girl here——"

"I thought she was a boy."

"Don, don't interrupt me that way. I feel like quarreling tonight and I don't like to be interrupted. Here it is after two o'clock, 'way after, and you are not ready to come to bed. You're not going out to take any more 'air' tonight, are you?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Go on to your war-council and have it over with. I'm going to sit up and wait for you, and you know I always fall asleep in my chair, that it isn't a bit comfortable to sleep that way. So hurry back, won't you?"

I kissed her, promised, and went to the basement.

MY BASEMENT is much like any other well-appointed basement, except that on the pretext of arranging the windows so as to make it difficult for any one to get in, it has been made almost impossible for any one to get out. Also, as it is a very large basement it is divided into two rooms, one of which is used for storage purposes, coal and discarded odds and ends, and the other is empty except for two or three backless chairs.

This room is rather large, being about fifteen by twenty-five, and so comparatively sound-proof that I have frequently used it to keep my hand in at shooting. I do not expect any one to believe me when I say that I tie a match to a silk thread and, swinging it, stand across the room and try to light the match without cutting the string or hitting the wood; but it may somewhat ease the skeptic mind if I add that I have sometimes exhausted a box of shells without so much as getting a flicker out of the match. However, I have occasionally done what I tried to do, and then shot out the flame.

As for that part of it, if burning matches are tossed into the air I can put them out four out of five times—which is not difficult for any fairly good marksman, because when the bullet comes anywhere near the flame it will snuff it. But then, for year in and year out I did little besides practise with cards and automatics.

So I went down to my shooting-gallery where six men, silent men, waited, three standing nervously on one side of the room, and two sitting and one leaning near the door on the other. The basement is well lighted.

My plan of procedure was all thought out, and I intended to use Mr. Henshaw as the fulcrum to pry information out of the others. Besides, I thought that I owed him an uncomfortable twenty minutes, and I pride myself particularly on paying such debts.

I went in as though well pleased with the world, and not at all provoked with the

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little incident that had thrown us together, nor yet did I appear to be gleeful and gloating, but merely in a pleasant frame of mind; and I surprised every one, Henshaw most of all, by greeting him familiarly and forcing him to shake hands.

He hesitated, and was ill at ease, being obviously discomfited by the impression this would make on his companions.

"That's all right," I assured him. "They can know everything now. They'll not get out to tell anybody. And I am sure obliged for the tip you gave me. I knew who was following and so it was easy enough to lay the trap."

"What do you mean?" he said in consternation.

"Oh, listen, Henshaw, you don't need to worry about what these fellows will think. Come on with me and we will have a little drink and a bite to eat."

A thunderclap out of the clear blue would not have astonished them all more than that.

Bad Bill Condon's face was a study in surprise; and the face of the third man—a well-built and capable-looking fellow, something of the sharp, aggressive type of man—grew dark with suspicion as he stared at Henshaw, who mumbled something indistinctly.

"But he tried to shoot you—I knocked his gun up!" the third man said incredulously, trying to convince himself that Henshaw was not a traitor.

I laughed slightly, and asked this man his name.

"Smith," he said promptly.

"I know. I know. Henshaw has told me that each of you is instructed to take the name of Smith whenever it is inconvenient to use your own.

"What's his name?" I asked Henshaw sharply, looking at him in a way that did not add to his peace of mind.

"Gregory," Henshaw answered reluctantly, for he very well knew that despite my incomprehensibly friendly attitude I was in no mood for evasions.

"Now, Mr. Gregory," I went on, "Henshaw's attempting to shoot me was a bit of camouflage. I thank you for your good intention in knocking his gun up, but I assure you that he would have missed me. If you had pulled down on me, he would have knocked your gun up too. And you notice that though he shot, I did not reply. Whereas it might interest you to know that if I had wished I could have shot you both as easy as——"

I tossed a lighted match from me.

"That."

The room roared with the reverberation, and the match was extinguished in mid-air.

When the deafening report died out, the room was so still that the breathing could be heard; then Gregory, boiling to the point of explosion, whirled and swung at Henshaw, cursing him for treachery.

I thrust Gregory back with no gentle hand.

"I'll get you, I'll get you, you —— dirty dog!" Gregory shouted at Henshaw.

"I didn't do it. It's all a lie—all lies. I've been square, Gregory. I have, I tell you I——"

I firmly touched Henshaw's arm and interrupted him:

"All that part is over, Henshaw. You don't need to care what these fellows think any more. I know how you feel about it. You said you didn't want them ever to know, but I can assure you that it will be some time before they will have a chance to tell any one. And here—" I turned to Gregory as I pulled a piece of paper from my pocket— "is something that may interest you. You can see by this that Henshaw and I have had an understanding for some time."

Henshaw rolled his eyes helplessly toward the ceiling as he recognized the letter that he had written to my dictation that night in the garage when we had first met.

"That's a lie——"

"Why, you wrote it, didn't you?" I asked.

"You made me. You know you did. Gregory, this devil——"

"Made you? Isn't that your regular handwriting? Mr. Gregory, you can recognize that, can't you, as Henshaw's handwriting? And you know very well that a man clever as he would certainly disguise his hand if anybody was trying to make him write such a letter. It is too absurd to talk of. Henshaw is terrified at the idea of word ever getting to H," I said as I reached out for the letter that Gregory had finished reading.

He gave it to me and looked with disgust and hate at Henshaw, but said nothing until Henshaw started again to protest.

"Shut up," Gregory commanded. "You

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—— dirty dog—you traitor. You'll get yours, and don't forget that!"

Henshaw clenched his teeth and fists and almost cried from fear and exasperation as he looked inarticulate at me, furious at the entanglement in which I had trapped him.

"Come on," I said, taking his arm, "let us have that drink and sandwich."

He drew back, but again he caught my eye, and he came on.

AS WE started out of the door, Jerry, quick-witted and Irish Jerry, who loves his joke, said:

"Well, Mr. Henshaw, I didn't dare speak to you before, but I've been laughing to myself to think how we put it over on 'em tonight, and you standin' there like you was one of the prisoners. It's great work you've done, my boy. Mind that night in the garage where we talked matters over? We're comin' out on top, thanks to you."

"—— you!" Henshaw said in a low, choking voice.

Rob sat with his mouth open, looking wonderingly at Henshaw, for Rob was fully convinced that Henshaw had all along been one of us. But George looked on with inscrutable features. He knew me better than Rob did.

Henshaw and I passed out.

The door closed behind us.

"Sit down," I said, indicating a kindling pile close to the furnace.

He sat down.

"Now, young man, you can have just ten seconds in which to think over what you had best do. You can come through, tell me all I want to know, be on my side, and I will give you what protection I can, or I will turn you loose again. That is, if you do not care to say anything, I will turn the three of you loose together and let you go your way, and you can see whether or not your protestations of innocence will have any weight in the ears of H against the words of Gregory. Take ten seconds and——"

"You've got me," he said, not waiting for even one second. "I'll talk, but for God's sake don't let those fellows get to me. They'll cut my throat. They got three of your men tonight."

"Gregory and Condon?" I asked, growing very cold and feeling my jaws set as though by tetanus.

"No. A fellow they call the 'Butcher.' He does the knifing for H. Used to be a wrestler, they say. He's a big Turk. Looks fat, you know. But not an ounce of it on him. He was——"

Henshaw stopped.

"Tell it all."

"He was going through the house—to kill everybody in it. They want that gold back, you know. But he said that just as he started to slip into the dining-room somebody shot at him, and he beat it fast. Claimed the bullet hit right by his head. Must not have been you—the way you hit that match."

I reflected that I would have to tell Mike that tomorrow the first thing, and explain that if he had not got the bullet he would probably have got a knife-wound that was even worse. Too, he would enjoy hearing about the Turk's vivid imagination, for, of course, I would not speak of the fearful tragedy that had taken place in the kitchen.

"Now," I said, "tell me about the lock. Why was it tampered with?"

"Lock?"

"Yes. The lock to the front door. Something was put into it so a key will not work. I don't just see what was to be gained."

He shook his head slowly and looked at me with puzzled eyes.

"I don't know," he added thoughtfully. "I didn't hear anybody say anything about it."

"Wouldn't it be well to try real hard to think if you are not possibly mistaken?"

"No use. I'll tell anything I know—come clean. But that is something I wasn't in on."

"All right. We will let that pass for a time. Now tell me why you talked as you did over the telephone—about me being Gaboreau."

"I believe you are," he said. "H does too. I had a long talk with H. I told him what all I had found out—about your being Everhard and all that. I didn't tell him what had happened to me. It wouldn't have looked well for me to be captured by a Chinaman, so I couldn't speak about the letter. I never expected he would hear of it. I didn't see how you were going to get it to him. He's the hardest man to find in this world. And I called up and talked that way to see if I couldn't get some kind of an admission out of you."

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"Were you satisfied?"

"Yes. I think you are Gaboreau."

"You really intended to shoot me, then?"

"I did," he said, turning his face away.

"Why did Gregory knock up the gun? He appears to be a fellow who would not squirm at the sight of a little blood."

"Why, they want you to live long enough to tell them where that gold is."

"Yes. I believe you have mentioned something about gold before. Just pretend that I know nothing of it, and tell me all you can. I would like to have your version anyway."

"There's nothing to it except that you stole a million dollars in currency and gold, and those fellows want it back. That's all."

"Um-hm," I remarked thoughtfully, wondering if Mr. Henshaw's imagination was not getting a little active, "but isn't a million rather a large sum for H to be carrying around as pocket change?"

"You know all about it. He needs money and doesn't dare use banks. Might be traced. H is careful. It takes money—cash—to operate a spy organization."

"Go on. Tell it all."

"Well, when the Wilhelmstrasse saw war was coming with the United States, it pulled the wires that put about a million and a half into H's hands. He's the big chief and paymaster. Of course none of us knew about it until the money was taken. There were a half-dozen fellows—German reservists—that stood guard over it. But you know all that."

"I don't know H's version. Go on."

"He had it cached in an apartment house. Just piled up in a room, and these Prussians lived there. All quiet and respectable, but no more than two of them ever left the house at one time. H said they didn't know what it was they were guarding—thought it was dynamite! It was done up in boxes about the size of shoe boxes—a little larger—and when H needed money he would telephone for one of them to meet him. Well—you got on to it and——"

"Meaning that I am Gaboreau?"

"Yes."

"Supposing you say 'Gaboreau.' It gives me more the sensation of being a spectator instead of a participant."

"Gaboreau got on to it. A week ago tomorrow he backed a moving van up to the house in the middle of the afternoon, and carried off gold, furniture, and reservists. He got all six Prussians—how, nobody can imagine and——"

"Wouldn't it be something of a joke if the six Prussians had found out they were not guarding dynamite and made off with the Fatherland's spy fund?"

"They didn't. One has been found dead every morning some place. One was shot, another drowned, another had fallen from a window, one was stabbed, one found in a room with the gas turned on, and this morning one was picked up in the railroad yards—run over. All in different parts of the city, and one death more or less doesn't attract attention.

"If all six had been killed at once there would have been a big sensation in the papers. This man Gaboreau is clever—and you've got me in between the devil and the deep blue. H is just as—as——"

"Murderous," I suggested.

"Yes."

"And you believe I did that?"

"Look how you got rid of those three bodies tonight."

"But I hadn't killed them. Your 'butcher' did that. And how did you know that they were in those blankets?"

"Gregory watched through the window. We were laying for a chance to grab you. That's why we followed."

"Three against four?"

"Gregory was going along just to see what would happen. He had an idea of notifying the police and getting you arrested for murdering them."

"The six Prussians?"

"No. Your three men. H doesn't call in the police to investigate his troubles. But it would be to his liking if he could pin something on to you without implicating himself."

"Gregory doesn't happen to be H?"

"I should say not. H is a big man—burly. Gregory stands pretty well with him."

I studied for a few moments to think of what else to ask, but I did not want to keep him too long as I had another little plan; so I proposed it then—

"Now, Henshaw, I am going to turn you loose again——"

"But you promised——"

"I know. And I expect to keep it. You will go and Gregory and Condon will

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remain, so H will hear nothing. You can tell him what happened—up to a certain point. For instance, I stopped the car you were in, covered all three, but you broke and ran and got away. But if you do not play square with me this time you will be in a tighter fix than ever, for when I turn Gregory and Condon loose, and H hears their stories, he will have no doubt but that you have been a traitor all along. It will look pretty bad, you know, to hold them and send you free."

"I don't want to do it."

"Certainly you don't. That is entirely natural. But one of these days when you have an appointment with H I expect to keep it for you. That seems to be about the only way I will ever be able to get in touch with the gentleman. But remember this. I won't keep that appointment in your place until you come here and wait while I go. In case I am assassinated certain of my friends will attend to you, so I suggest that you do not try again to double-cross me. Now if you will come with me we will go have that drink and sandwich."

"I'll take the drink," he said, and he looked as though he needed it.

We went up-stairs and he had two drinks. Then I took him to the front door and let him out. A haggard and fear-touched man, he went forth into the night; and being much less confident in his own cunning than previously, he no doubt thought that there were others who, though lacking the training of "international agents," were not unskilled in devious and tortuous ways.

WHEN I went below again Rob was nodding on his stool while George and Jerry were leaning against the wall talking in low tones. Condon was hunched on the floor, his head drooping apathetically between his knees, but Gregory paced back and forth, a restless animal, angered at being caged, and hot-hearted to be free to kill Henshaw and to try to do the same to me.

"No doubt," I said to Gregory, "you would like to conjure your Turk wrestler and his long knife through the keyhole; but I do not believe in magic, and the door to this room does not happen to have a keyhole. It is arranged so as to be very effectively locked from the outside. You will notice that there are no windows, though some ventilation. I shall leave you to find an exit if you can. I will have a few blankets thrown in here and you can make yourself at home. And if you wish to make a noise, to yell and break up the chairs, do not hesitate for fear of disturbing the household.

"It may be that you will soon have some company. And also I wish to say that I know it seems a shame to treat you this way, when with the best of intentions you struck up Henshaw's gun—but it is the fortunes of war. If you happen to feel hungry or care for a drop or two of Scotch—I am sure Mr. Condon does, for he has partaken of my liberality before—I will have something brought down."

He cursed ragefully, but my temper was not disturbed. I do not feel like being ruffled by abuse when I have the upper hand, and when the other man has it, as many of them have had it—for a time—I never get excited because it hinders clear thinking. Clear, quick thinking, if one has the nerve to do what seems best, will usually win through."

I had George bring down some bedding, a small bottle of whisky and some potted meats.

I was sincere in wishing to make Gregory and Condon as comfortable as was within keeping with the conditions. I have never insulted an unarmed man, and I have never mistreated one who chanced to have slipped into my hands and my fingers have closed on. I have heard that it used to be said of me as a kind of grim joke in certain parts of the West where I am not unknown, that I am not really a bad sort of a fellow, for if I shoot a man I am always willing to pay for the funeral.

But I am not cruel. I may be—as I have been accused of being—heartless. If any one gets between me and what I am trying to do, and he declines to move, my attitude is not likely to be gentle. I have no regrets. I do what I think is right, and if I break laws, I break them only more effectively to hit at men outside the pale.

The three of us went out, George carefully bolting the door which was equipped with three sliding bolts to resist the heaviest of weights that might be put against it; and the door leading down to the basement was also fastened with a chilled steel lock and

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the key secreted high on a nail in a dark corner near by.

Jerry yawned in frank sleepiness, and Rob stumbled drowsily, for the reaction from the excitement had left him in almost a state of exhaustion and his youthful body was aching for a restorative sleep.

"Nothin' more t'night, Mr. Everhard?" Jerry asked with the glimmer of a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes," I said, then told of what I had learned from Henshaw.

"By the way," I remarked to George when Jerry and Rob had gone their ways, "if we should get our hands on that million dollars, most of it must be in bills, I think —where would be the best place to hide it?"

"Not a hungry mouse in this basement," George suggested in his usual oblique fashion, meaning that it would be safe from anybody's nibbling.

"No. But if six armed Germans in one apartment could not keep out Gaboreau there is a chance that somebody would find a way to search our house. I don't think so, but occasionally my calculations miss. Well, think it over, George. And as it is pretty well along toward the Spring I believe something ought to be done for the lawn.

"Supposing you order about—say six or seven—make it seven—good big loads of manure and have two of them spread at once. Do it tomorrow. Then pile the rest of it between the arbor and the garage. It is not likely to be noticed there. But be sure to have the lawn fairly well covered."

He looked at me with as much amazement as his face is capable of showing and said—

"Yes, sir."

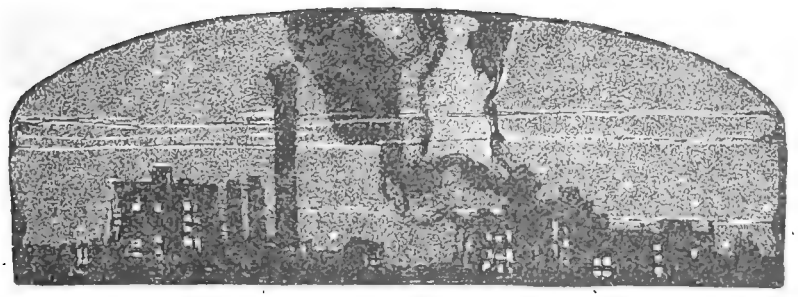
"By noon tomorrow the dummy should be here. It is promised. But don't open the door to any one else than Mr. Ralston. No matter who else comes or at what time, call me before you let him in. It is nearly morning—you turn in. I don't think I shall go to bed. I'll doze for a while in a chair."

I went up-stairs and found Vivian curled in a chair, uncomfortable, but sound asleep. I lifted her and laid her on the bed, pulling the covers well over, turned out the light and left.

I had turned out all lights. The house was dark and silent, but I knew my way about. There is, even for me, something of an eery feeling in being silent and awake in a big unlighted house as the night wears away, and I very carefully adjusted my chair with the back to the wall so that no one could creep up from behind.

But as I settled myself I saw across the room a tip of red slowly burn itself through the darkness and grow brighter and brighter, then drop downward and disappear. I had thought myself alone, but Yang, inscrutable, unsleeping, kept vigil behind interminable cigarets that were lighted one from the other.

TO BE CONTINUED



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PIE FOR MAGPIE

by W C Tuttle

Author of "The Domestication of Dobie," "The Hand of Providence," etc.

IF IT is true that it takes all kinds of folks to make a world, Magpie Simpkins was a specimen without a parallel. He'd take a chance on anything from soda-water to stocks, and his head was a regular greenhouse fo fool ideas.

He's so tall that any one would bet he had seventeen more vertebræ than the average man, and to hear him talk you'd think his family name was Knowledge. I'm Ike Harper, and I've been a suffering pardner to this long, gun-packing cross between a walking argument and a psychologist for years and years, and while I don't change much in looks I'm breaking down internally at an alarming rate.

This day me and Magpie are setting in our cabin on Plenty Stone Creek with Tellurium Woods, and Magpie has got his long nose stuck deep into an old magazine.

Tellurium Woods is worth a passing mention. He's anti everything except "Have a drink?", when he's open to conviction. He's about five feet six inches in height, and about the same in diameter, and uses a flannel rag instead of a comb. He's got a claim on the creek above ours, neither of which show anything except recent labor. He ain't partial to games of chance—carrying his own marked deck and loaded dice, and pines for a cinch bet.

Magpie lays the magazine down on the table, while he rolls a cigaret, and I can see that he's found food for thought. I sighs to myself. I know the symptoms. After the smoke is trailing up past his long nose, he turns to me and Tellurium, and snorts:

"Pshaw! They make a fuss about something that anybody could do just as well, and maybe I could do it a lot better."

"What bank got robbed this time, Magpie?" inquires Tellurium.

Magpie looks at Tellurium, sad-like, and shakes his head—

"No wonder your hair don't show no animation, Tellurium."

And then he goes on reading.

"Well, you don't need to keep it a secret, Magpie," I reminds him.

"It says here," says he, turning a few pages, "it says here that a feller went out into the woods, without no clothes on, and without no weapons but his bare hands, and stayed thirty days, when he comes back healthy and clothed in skins. 'Next to Nature,' they calls it. By cripes, a magazine must be hard up for stuff to write about!"

"Pretty hard thing to do at that," states Tellurium. "I takes off my hat to any man what can pull that stunt."

"Hard!" snorts Magpie, "you call that hard? That's a cinch for a he man."

"Exactly," agrees Tellurium, "that's why me and you ought to take off our hats to him. We couldn't do it, Magpie."

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"Couldn't, eh? You couldn't, Mr. Woods —that's a cinch."

"Neither could you, Mr. Simpkins, which makes it a double-rig."

"The —— I couldn't! Bet you forty dollars I could."

"See you, Magpie, and raise you forty more."

Magpie turns to me—

"Ike, how much money you got?"

"Just enough for me to get both hands around it and hang on," says I. "Tellurium is betting on a cinch or he wouldn't bet, so you might as well back up, Magpie."

"Thanks, Ike," says he. "We'll make that for a hundred, Tellurium. I'll get a pencil and write out the articles of agreement."

"How much you got, Magpie?" I asks.

"Forty-three dollars."

What can you do with a person like that? I had fifty-seven dollars before them two fool-hens got to betting, and when things are settled I ain't got nothing but a receipt, which ain't honored in no place where they sells things.

The agreement reads something like this:

To Whom It May Concern:

It is this day agreed that Magpie Simpkins, party of the first part, bets Tellurium Woods, party of the hind part, one hundred dollars that he can go out into the woods and live for thirty days: starting out from a designated spot, with no clothes and no weapons.

The party of the first part agrees to come back in good health, nourished from the bosom of nature, and it is further agreed that the said Magpie Simpkins, Tellurium Woods and Ike Harper, stakeholder, and party of minor interest shall, do and hereby agree not to tell a darn soul of the bet, and in case the parties of the first part or parties of the hind part break this agreement they shall forfeit their half of the bet, and in case Ike tells he shall lose the money he loaned to the party of the first part.

We all signed it. They wanted me to hold up my right hand, and swear that I'll keep my mouth shut, but I said:

"If you think I'm going to sign that article and then tell anybody, you're crazy. I expect to lose the money, but I don't give my coin to no dealer before I get a look at the cards."

The next day Magpie went back to Nature. He limped off into the woods, up in the Medicine Hills, and I'll bet that Nature, if she saw him coming, was ashamed of her handiwork.

THE next morning I'm there on the sunny side of our cabin, when I sees a caravan coming up the trail. There's something about this group of human beings that reminds me of something I've seen before, and when they gets a little closer, I says to me—

"Ike, there's Professor Phinney, or you're a wall-eyed pike!"

It sure was that same identical old pelican, with his shiny, hard hat on his head, and them same crêpe-rimmed specs dangling on his skinny nose. His knees interfere with the burro's ear action, and his coattails makes a hy-iu drape for the rear end of the critter.

Behind him comes Mrs. Professor, fatter and more painful than ever, and behind her is another lady, who is strange to me. Just then a burro tops the rise, and I sees Doctor Doolittle. Yes, sir, here comes that doctor, knee-breeches and all, and so far as I can see he ain't changed none at all. Just as fat and red-faced as ever, and across in front of him, almost covered with his stummick, is that same shotgun that he hopes some day to kill something with.

They pilgrims up and the professor squints at me over his specs.

"How—er—do you do," says he. "Is that you, Mr. Harper?"

"I'll have to admit it, old-timer," says I, uncoiling myself from the chair, and shaking hands with him.

Doc falls off his steed, and waddles up to shake hands, too.

"Ike," pants the doctor, "I'm glad to see you. Ah-h-h-h! How are you?"

"Reasonable, Doc," says I. "Howdy, Mrs. Phinney. How are you?"

"Unreasonable!" snaps the professor, before the old lady can open her mouth. "She's done nothing but complain all the way. Meet my daughter Angeline. This is her first trip of this kind."

"And her last!" snorts the old lady. "Your theories will be the death of both of us. It's the most foolish undertaking I ever heard of, Wallace. Absolutely the most foolish thing on earth!"

"I don't mind the trip, mother," states Angeline, in the voice of a medder lark. "I rather love it, don't you know?"

"I know," says I." Is this the end of your journey, folks, or do you intend to pilgrim on?"

"We terminate here," says the professor.

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"We will be with you for some little time. Is Mr. Simpkins at home?"

"Magpie," corrects the doctor. "I called him Mr. Simpkins, and he got indignant. I like him—so unconventional and quaint."

"Magpie," says I, reaching deep into my soul for an alibi, "Magpie is dead."

"Dead?" squeaks the professor. "Dead? Well, well!"

"I'm so sorry," says the old lady, acting almost human. "So sorry. It must be awful hard for you."

"Yes'm. Almost impossible."

"Magpie is dead," wonders the doctor. "From what cause?"

"Nature took him unto its own," says I, removing my hat. "You—er—might say that natural history took him unto its own."

"Exactly," agrees the professor. "Just how?"

"Met a grizzly bear," says I. "Never met before."

"Must have been sudden," says the old lady.

"Yes'm, I'd say it was quick."

"Oh!" exclaims the doctor. "Grizzly bear?"

"I told you we'd have them to contend with," argues the professor. "Even with grizzlies abroad it will merely lend zest to the experiment."

"Zest!" yelps the old lady. "Experiment! Did you ever in your life hear of such a thing, Mr. Harper? The professor, supposedly a learned man, and the doctor, also of supposedly human intelligence, have come out here to prove the theory that a man can live a whole month in the woods, without clothes or weapons or food, except such as they can snatch from nature. Did you ever hear of such a thing? Isn't it the most absurd thing on earth?"

I backed against the cabin and stared at that outfit.

"You see!" cackled the old lady, "he's thunderstruck to think that intelligent men would think of such a thing."

"It—er—has been done," states the professor, and the doctor nods and pats himself on the chest.

"It can be done again, too," states he. "For me it will remove superfluous adipose tissue, and for the professor it will be the means of bringing back the vigor of youth, and perhaps a little flesh. What do you think, Mr. Harper?"

"Think? I don't never attempt it, Doctor—especially in the presence of learned men. I'm a darn fool, and I'm proud of it. I just know enough to keep my clothes on and eat off a table. When do you fellers intend to go back to the Cave Age?"

"Tomorrow," says the professor. "We are both anxious to try out the theory. Today we will fix things so the ladies will be comfortable—if you don't mind having them around here for a while—and tomorrow we will enter the forest in quest of adventure and health."

What could I do? They say that lightning don't hit twice in the same place, but this bolt did. I gives the ladies the cabin, and moves my blankets out under a tree. Tellurium comes shuffling along a little later, and stops to look the outfit over. The professor is setting there on the steps, and Tellurium sizes him up.

"Ike," says he, "what in —— is that?"

"Not so loud!" I cautions him. "That person which you designate as a 'thing' is Magpie's father."

"Magpie's father! My gosh, I never knew—well, huh! Magpie favors him a heap, Ike."

Tellurium walks over to the professor and holds out his hand.

"Pleased to meet you," says he. "Surprised and pleased. I've knowed the boy for a long time, and while he's a bit long on arguments and fool ideas, I welcome his ancestor. He's got your nose and legs. I reckon you're proud of him."

"Yeaus," drawls the professor, squinting up at Tellurium. "Yeaus. Just who do you refer to?"

"Magpie."

"Ah! Yeaus, too bad. I feel sorry for him."

"Well," says Tellurium, hitching up his belt, "after taking a comprehensive look I agree that he's to be pitied. He's too old to outgrow it now."

Tellurium grins at me, and pilgrims away.

"That—er—party must be a bit off his mind," remarks the professor. "Do people outgrow deaths from grizzly bears?"

"Not this Summer," says I. "That's one of Magpie's closest friends, and when Magpie passed out it affected his brain."

"He must have been a close friend," agrees the old pelican.

"Close?" says I. "Say, he's so close that one day he let a train run over a nickel so

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he could pass it on Wick Smith for two-bits' worth of beans."

"Exactly," agrees the professor. "He was Damon to Magpie's Pythias."

What can you do with a person like that? There ain't no open season, and they don't class as varmints, so you just got to suffer them to live. The professor has loads of brains and no sense. The doctor grins at me, and tried to wink. It must be awful to have a face so fat that you have to register extreme pain in order to wink.

THEN next day them two hombres turns themselves loose. I takes them way over into the heavy timber, and brings their clothes back with me. They has quite a heated argument as to whether the professor shall or shall not retain his shoes, but they finally decides that on account of his bunions he shall be permitted to wear them, and the cloth things he covers them with. The doctor insists that so long as the professor concedes himself a pair of shoes, he'll allow himself to retain a few feet of twine string and a bent pin to catch trout with. I sets there and suffers internal troubles until they gets things settled, and pilgrims off into the jungle.

Man, it was a sight! Nothing on earth was ever funnier than to see a fat man, minus his clothes, picking his steps into the timber, with one hand held out in front of him, dangling a twine string, while behind him comes an animated hat-rack, the upper part of his body clothed in crêpe-rimmed specs, and the lower half in a pair of shoes with gray cloth blankets over same.

The old lady sure read the riot act to me when I got back. She seemed to think that I ought to have talked them out of it. Fine chance, after they comes a thousand miles to try it out.

"Grizzly bears will get them!" she wails.

"Yes'm," says I, "I wouldn't put it past a grizzly. Cheer up, though, 'cause the wolves may beat the bear to it."

"Wolves!" she whoops. "Is there wolves here, too?"

"Flocks of them, ma'am. Highbehinds, suspender snakes and wild-trout-hounds. This country is overwhelmed with animal life."

Them two ladies gets real worked up over it, and are arguing about calling for the police, when in comes "Mighty" Jones and his coyote pack. Mighty is one of these alleged human beings who get a hobby and ride it to death.

His last obsession was wolf-hounds, and he sure acquires some pack. There's everything in it from a water spaniel to a St. Bernard. Seven alleged fox-hounds furnishes the trailing, and the rest just sort of form a mob. He rides up and admires the ladies, and then I introduce him.

"I never knew that fox hunting had advanced this far West," says Miss Angeline, trying to keep a spaniel from gnawing her shoelace and a greyhound from licking her ear at the same time.

"Yes'm," says Mighty. "Foxes ain't so much beside what I've been after to-day. Ike, did you ever see a wild man?"

"Not lately. I never did see them as a regular thing. Why, Mighty?"

"I been chasing one for three hours. Honest to gosh! Wore out my horse and all my dogs. Where is Magpie?"

"Wild man!" I snorts. "You better quit drinking."

"Ain't had a drink for a week. Where's Magpie?"

"There ain't no wild man," I argues. "Must have been a bear."

"Don't you reckon I know a bear from a man? Magpie at home?"

"He—he's dead. Didn't you hear about it?" informs and inquires the old lady.

"Dead? Magpie ain't dead."

"Yes, he is," insists the old lady. "Ate up by a grizzly."

I'll bet that old lady was some gossip pedler in her own town, 'cause she seemed to get a lot of pleasure out of telling the bad news to Mighty.

"Aw!" says Mighty. "Aw. Is that right, Ike?"

"You're questioning the lady's veracity, Mighty," says I.

"Did you see the bear kill him, Ike?" he asks.

I shakes my head, and the old lady chips in—

"Mr. Harper knows that it did just the same."

Mighty picks up his reins and whistles for his dogs—

"Well," says he, "there's something queer about it, if you asks me."

And then he rides off down the trail.

"That's the worst of it," says I. "When a person gets killed, you'll always find some

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nosey person what wants proof. Grizzly bears don't leave nothing to prove it by."

"How do you know a bear killed him?" asks Miss Angeline.

"Well," says I, sparring for time, "that's easy. A grizzly always—do you know anything about grizzly bears, ma'am? You don't? Well, that makes it easier. When a grizzly makes a kill he always brays four times in a row. Sabe? Sort of a final Keno. I heard one bray the required number of times just after Magpie left."

"How utterly appalling," wails Miss Angeline, "and didn't you go to his resuce?"

"No, ma'am! It's too late to even go to his funeral. Everything is over or inside by that time. All I could do would be to swell the list of dead or injured, so I keeps away."

"Heavens above!" wails the old lady. "And this is what is coming to my poor darling Wallie and dear Doctor Doolittle. Oh, why do men do things like this?"

"Search me," says I, and just then the old lady cuts loose a real howl, and grabs herself by the earrings.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh!" she yelps, running the scale with her voice. "Oh, I forgot the wild man! He's over there with father and the doctor!"

"He may be over there, ma'am," says I, consoling-like, "but not with them. He ain't that wild."

That night they barricaded that cabin door until it would take a ton of dynamite to open it from the outside. They holds open prayer-meeting in favor of the professor and doctor, saying a few words for the mangled soul of Magpie Simpkins—they called him Simpson, and winds up with a few words in regards to softening the natural proclivities of local grizzly bears.

I'd almost slip into sin and deception to be prayed for by Miss Angeline. It's along about ten o'clock. I'm laying there in my blankets, smoking a cigaret, when I hears footsteps approaching, and I sees the outline of Tellurium Woods. I whistles to him, and he comes over and sets down with me.

"Ike," says he, "I just come over to tell you that Magpie has busted his agreement to the extent that he ain't depending on nature for all his nourishment."

"If that's all he's busted he's lucky," says I. "Mighty Jones' pack of dogs has chased him all day."

Tellurium lets this information percolate for a while, and then he says:

"Pshaw! I don't reckon them hounds are much good. I made a pie to-day, Ike. Honest to gosh, apple pie! Left her outside to cool, while I goes out to try and catch some fish for supper, and when I gets back she's gone. A blanket is also gone from where I leaves her on a stump.

"I just come down to explain about that pie, Ike. It ain't exactly a digestible piece of food. That ornery Piegan, Runs-With-a-Wolf, has been pilfering from me lately. He picks up everything he can lay his hands on, so I bakes this pie to teach him a lesson. There's a few apples in it, Ike, but there's a danged lot of quinine, ipicac and cayenne pepper. She's guaranteed to cure colds, empty a stubborn stummick and warm you to the bone. I know that Injun didn't get her, 'cause he's visiting down at the reservation."

JUST then a burro starts singing his little song, and before he gets through the first verse another one gives him his audible support. Me and Tellurium don't pay no attention, being used to the song of the Rocky Mountain canary, but from the cabin comes a long, loud wail, and here comes two white-robed figures. They've got their arms around each other, and the old lady yells:

"Mr. Harper! Oh-h-h-h! Mr. Harper! They're gone! They're gone!"

"Yes'm," says I. "They've got nerve to stay this long. Better go back to bed before you catch cold."

"Heartless creature!" wails the old lady. "Why don't you do something? Isn't there anything you can do? Oh, my poor Wallie!"

"Who's Wallie?" asks Tellurium, in a whisper.

"He's a nut," says I truthfully, and then I turns to the ladies: "Just what do you want me to do? Also I'd love to know what in thunder is the matter with you two. What you got—toothache, earache or stummickache?"

"They're gone, I tell you!" howls the old lady, while Angeline sets down on the ground and hangs on to the old lady's knees, like a picture I saw once of an angel hanging on to a rock.

"The grizzly brayed eight times!" sobs Miss Angeline, and I begins to see a light.

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"Good night!" snorts Tellurium." I feels that I'm *hors de compact* in a community where grizzly bears pick up the habits of a jackass," and he pikes off in the dark.

I manages to get them females back into the cabin, after promising to go and see what the grizzly left. I went back after a while and told them to rest easy, 'cause all the grizzly killed was a couple of elk.

"The—the doctor is an Elk," says Miss Angeline.

"Not this kind," says I. "This kind wears the teeth in their mouth." The next morning I leaves the females cleaning out the cabin while I takes my bronc and goes scouting. I swings around the head of Sillman Gulch on to Injun Creek. I ties my bronc and moseys down to the creek to see what I can discover.

After a while I pokes out on to a nice bare spot above the creek, and sets down to take a smoke. At first I don't see a thing, but after a while I sees something move across the creek, and when I gets my eyes set right I sees Magpie Simpkins. He's laying flat behind a log and seems to be interested in something below him. I sneaks up to where I can get a better view, and right below me is the doctor and professor.

It sure is a scene from nature. Down there, humped up on a rock, with a blanket draped over his shoulders is the professor, busy picking thorns out of his legs. On a lodge-pole, which is bridging the creek, crouches the doctor, both legs wrapped around the pole, and hanging on with one hand, while he angles with the other.

Sudden-like he yanks up with the string, and out flips a small trout, but before the doctor can swing it to shore it falls off his bent pin. I'm only a short distance above them, so I can see fine, and hear 'most everything they say.

Sudden-like I sees Magpie again. He's sneaking up behind the professor's rock, and he's some snaky individual. Pretty soon he wiggles up close, takes something, and then backs up until he's into the brush again.

"The plot begins to congeal," says I to myself.

The doctor snags another fish, with the same result. The professor shakes his head, sad-like, and yells—

"Never mind, they won't stay hooked."

"This is Friday!" yells the doctor. "We've got to have fish with our pie," and keeps right on angling.

I looks around for Magpie, and I sees him sneak across the creek below me, and Injun up my side. I reckon he's pining to get a look at the features of them naturals, and has got to circle to do it. I rolls behind a bush and waits for him. He sneaks out, all humped over, with that pie under his arm, and his skin area bears proof that he's been going through brush regardless. He looks like a smallpox patient that had been curry-combed. He squats down and peers at them two below, and scratches his head.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he snorts. "Dog-gone, it can't be!" and then he looks at the pie beside him, and nods.

He breaks that pie in two, and seems a heap interested in something he finds. I reckon he ain't been eating none too good off nature, 'cause he goes into that pie like a steam shovel into mud.

He masticates slower and slower, and an expression of pain comes across his face. He looks at the piece of pie in his hand, and then lays it tenderly into the tin. He spat out that mouthful of pie, along with a cuss word that would gladden the heart of a professional mule-skinner, and then gathers up tin and all and peers over the bank.

Swish! He sails that pan far out over the creek, and to the left of the professor. It cuts a beautiful circle to the left, turns over and dips to the right, and completes a shot that Magpie or no other man could do again in a lifetime. It hit the professor slap in the chest and knocked him off the rock. The pie must have been soggy to make it hold to the tin thataway, and when it hit it busted like shrapnel.

Yar-o-o-o-o! Yar-o-o-o-o-o! comes a howling up the creek, and down through the timber comes Mighty Jones' pack of hounds.

Magpie just simply fades away from there. I leans over the edge and watches the scene below me. They've heard it, too. The professor is standing on the rock, like a statue of "Science at Bay," while the doctor gives an action picture of "Lard Leaving the Log," and he left it backwards. He almost dried up the creek when he hit, and then the waters closed over him.

I heard Phinney squeak like a rusty wheel, when the doctor went out of sight, and then he lights running. D. F. are two of the initials the old boy wears after his name, and right now I argues that they stands for

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"Danged Fast." The way he ambled out of there would keep an antelope busy to imitate, and he hung on to his blanket, too. I sees the doctor roll out on a sandbar below there, and head off into the brush after the professor, and I says to myself—

"You keep that up for a while, old-timer, and that adipose tissue won't hamper you none to speak of."

Then came the dogs. They comes down the creek, howling their heads off, and behind them is Mighty Jones and two other men. Them dogs starts milling around one spot down there, which is where the professor has been setting. All to once a dog breaks out of the pack and beats it for the creek, and some more follow him. Them dogs acts like they hadn't had a drink for a week.

Mighty gets off his bronc and examines the place where the dogs got so excited, and pretty soon he holds up something in his hand.

"Pie!" he yells, and the rest of them comes up to examine it.

They tried to get the dogs to take up the trail, but all they will do is lap water and howl their fool heads off.

Finally they decides to dispense with the dogs, and when I sees them motion like they were coming my way, I pilgrims back to my bronc and takes a roundabout way home.

The three riders and the dogs are there when I arrives, and the old lady is right in her glory. She sure is pedling information to that bunch, and they looks hostile to me when I shows up. I walks up on the porch, after kicking a few dogs out of the way and faces them. One is Bill McFee, our sheriff, and the other is "Scenery" Sims, his deputy, and of course the third one is Mighty.

"Howdy, Bill," says I. "How's tricks?"

"Hunting for a little information, Ike," says he. "Where's Magpie?"

I LOOKS them over, and feels foolish. It don't pay to lie to the law, and it don't pay to lose fifty-three dollars either. I clears my throat, and kicks another dog off the porch.

"Well," says I, "Magpie he—he——"

"Don't lie!" squeaks Scenery. "Don't lie to us."

"Anything you say may be used against you, Ike," warns Bill.

I don't like Scenery, and me and Bill never got to the kissing stage.

"Scenery," says I, "some day I'm going to assassinate you."

"Just like you did——"

"Whoa!" snorts Bill. "Don't say that, Scenery. I want to know where Magpie Simpkins is."

"Tellurium said—" begins Scenery, but Bill shuts him up.

"Never mind what anybody told you: I want a statement from Ike."

"Tellurium said, did he?" says I. "I don't know what he said, Bill, but I do know that he knows where Magpie is, and I promised that same Tellurium Woods that I wouldn't tell. Sabe?"

"But the lady here said something about a bear," whines Scenery. "She said——"

"Too much talk," snaps Bill. "Mighty talks about wild men until the whole country is aroused, and then this here lady orates about bears that bray, and Tellurium wails about pie thieves. Danged place is getting too civilized. Reckon I'll go up and talk with Tellurium. Come on, Scenery."

They pilgrims away, and I sets down on the porch.

"We're going away, too," states Mrs. Professor, "I—I won't stay here another night. We'll go to Piperock and live at the hotel."

"You got some riding animals, ma'am?" asks Mighty.

"Bureaus," says the old lady. "We don't know the way down there, but I'd rather be lost than to stay here."

"I'll escort you down," offers Mighty, grinning at me. "Where are your ridingrigs?"

I don't offer no information or help. What's the use of arguing with a female? When they turns and waves at me from down the trail, I just throws away my cigaret and goes into the cabin. If they wants to interpret that gesture as a wave it's up to them.

I hears somebody yelp outside, when I'm almost asleep, so I goes outside and shakes hands with "Old Testament" Tilton and his family. The old pelican is on another one of his pilgrimages after souls, and takes his wife and daughter along. They has a packoutfit, and the old lady orates that she'd admire a chance to look at our stove.

"I've shed tears over a camp-fire so long that I hankers for a stove," says she.

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Mrs. Tilton looks like a relic of the Puritans and her daughter ain't more than a jump behind her.

"Come on, Drusilla," says she, "we'll make some biscuits, while father quotes a few scriptures to Mr. Harper."

"Ma'am," says I, bowing low, "I'd rather see you making biscuits. I figure that there ain't nothing better for a man's soul than to see a pretty woman making biscuits."

Maybe I stretched the beauty part a heap, but I've been corraled before by Old Testament, and I'd a heap rather add an extra lie to my already overload of sin than to stand for his line of talk. Old Testament pulls off his boots and lays down on a bunk, while the old lady digs into the flour. Miss Drusilla pokes her nose into a magazine, and I sets there and smokes. I'd just about forgot Magpie, when all to once I hears a noise at the door. There stands the professor.

Yes, thank you, he's still got the blanket. He seems to have cut a hole in it for each leg to stick through, and there he stands, holding on to the corners of that blanket. He's got a rope around his waist, but don't seem to have much confidence in it.

The old boy seems to have lost his specs and most of his ambition, but he pilgrims right inside and throws one arm around Mrs. Tilton.

"My darling," he gurgles, "I'm through. I find that the theory is all right but the practise is impossible. Were you worried?"

Old Testament sets up on the bunk and looks goggle-eyed at the old coot, but beyond the professor's oration there ain't a word spoken for several seconds.

Sudden-like the old lady tears away, and the next second sees the professor crowned with a pan of dough. Believe me, it was some coronation. He backs away, clawing the flour out of his eyes, and sets down on Drusilla's lap.

He stares at the surroundings, foolish-like, and then he sort of sees things in their right light. Just then comes a delicate sort of a cough at the door, and we all turns.

I don't know where the doctor made the raise, but he'd got a dirty saddle blanket draped around him, and a look of disgust on his face. He looks like nature had sure put him in bad humor.

"Lead us not into temptation," I hears Old Testament say, and sees him reaching for the doctor's shotgun.

The professor slips off Drusilla's lap and makes a quick limp for the door.

"It's all wrong, Doctor," says he, through the dough. "It's——"

I reckon the doctor thought the same about it, 'cause them two mismated cave men starts going away as fast as possible.

Old Testament clumps past me, and before I can stop him he bangsa way with both barrels of that gun. I reckon the professor is so thin it would take a choke-bored gun to hit him at ten feet, but the doctor seems to go out of his way to hurdle a stump.

Old Testament picks himself up out of the dirt, and circles around and sets down on the porch. I reckon that gun was loaded by an anarchist.

"Heaven is my home!" exclaims Mrs. Tilton, leaning against the doorway, while Drusilla pants like a tired pup.

"Brother Harper, I'd admire to know what that was!" groans Old Testament, holding his head in his hands.

"Sounded like half a stick of dynamite in each barrel," says I, and just then I turns and sees Mrs. Professor and Angeline, setting right there on their burros, looking at us.

Mrs. Professor tumbles off her noble steed, waddles right over and grabs Old Testament by the ear.

"You assassin!" she whoops. "What did you shoot at my Wallie for?"

"Your—madam, you're hurting me!" squeaks the old man. "Let go my ear! I don't know who Wallie is but I do know that one of them cannibals kissed my wife."

"Kissed your wife?" wonders the old lady, and then she stares at Mrs. Tilton. "Well!" she gasps. "Wallie must have lost his glasses!"

Them four females acts like they belonged to the same club, and when nobody seems to want to make conversation, I speaks up and says—

"I thought you ladies were on your way to Piperock."

"We were," nods Mrs. Professor. "Our guide was behind us, and all at once he disappeared, so we came back."

Bill McFee and Scenery Sims rides into the yard and sort of relieves the situation.

"Tellurium wasn't home," states Bill. "You get your hat, Ike, and come along with us. There's something queer about this layout, if you asks me."

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"AMEN," says Old Testament, "wild and queer. Look! Who's dead now?"

It was a queer outfit. Two calico broncs, without enough harness for one, hitched to an antiquated hearse. One black wooden plume still sways drunken-like from one corner; and the glass windows on the sides are so dirty and patched that you can't see inside. It's the equipage of old Runs-With-a-Wolf.

In order to make it a Winter vehicle, the old boy cut a hole under the seat to run his lines through so he can lie on his stummick and drive from inside. It looks like an orderly sort of a runaway—not having a visible driver, and the crowd splits as it swings around in front of the cabin and stops.

A high-pitched voice inside yells—

"Are you here?"

"Yes'm," squeaks Scenery, blowing his nose like a trumpet. "Get right out and bury it. We've got a preacher."

Yar-o-o-o-o! Woof! Yip! Kyoodle! Yar-o-o-o-o!

Maybe that don't give much of an idea of the noise, but it's as near as a human being can come to the noise them dogs make, as they string into the place, and right at their head comes a human being advertising the fact that he wears red underclothes and a desire to hit a tall place.

The fact that there's ladies present don't bother him at first, but when he gets nearer he shies around in front of that team of calico broncs with that bunch of howling mongrels at his heels. It don't take them calicoes long to find out that they're scared, and they immediate and soon forgets that they're hitched to a sacred sedan.

It's about six jumps to where two stumps stand about three feet apart, and it looks like them broncs have been used to going through gates, 'cause they hits square between them stumps. The hearse don't go with them—not all of it. Runs-With-a-Wolf ain't no mechanic, and his family equipage ain't in the best of repair, so when she hits them stumps, the coupling pole breaks and the top and the hind wheels turn over once and stay put.

Them dogs are howling around and around the cabin, so I looks up and sees Mighty Jones' face sticking over the edge.

"The murderer!" he yelps. "Sneaked up and hauled me off my bronc! Says: 'Come to me, Sweet Marie!' and then he swiped my clothes, and set my dogs on me!"

"My gosh!" explodes Bill. "This country don't need a sheriff! It——"

"My darling, will you get my trousers?" asks a squeaky voice, and there is the professor's head sticking out of the top of that hearse, where the plume used to be.

Sudden-like another board loosens up and the doctor's face, like a rising moon, comes up. He stares all around at the ruin, and then up behind him appears the features of Runs-With-a-Wolf.

"*Hyas cultus!*" proclaims the old buck. "Wah! Haulum wild man no good! He-e-e-e-eap loco! Gettum fi' dolla, losum hack! No good!"

"And in our trouser pocket you will find some money which you will please hand this noble red man as recompense for his services and damage," continues the professor in his sing-song voice.

"Wallie-e-e-e! Are you all there?" shrieks Mrs. Professor.

"He is not!" snaps the doctor. "If he was all there he wouldn't be in this predicament, madam. You women go in the house and hand out all the clothes in sight. If there's an overcoat—hand it to me, 'cause I'm going to play safe. I can use gloves and some ear muffs, too."

"The theory was sound," sings the professor, "but the practise was insufferable. I'm going to take the lecture platform against hunting with hounds. I'm——"

But just then Ricky Henderson gallops in and pulls up beside Bill McFee. He sort of gawps at the busted hearse, and then says to Bill:

"They caught the wild man, Bill. The bunch borrowed Doughgod Smith's bear dogs, and treed him over at the head of Sillman Gulch. It was Tellurium Woods!"

"My——!" gasps Bill. "I'm going home! This is driving me wild, too. I came up here to find the body of Magpie Simpkins, and—well, what do you know about that!"

Here comes Magpie leading them calico broncs, and he's grinning like he was a heap pleased. He grins at the busted hearse and at the three heads sticking out, and then turns to McFee—

"What kind of a circus are you trying to pull off in my yard, Bill?"

"Search me," says Bill, weak-like. "You're supposed to have been murdered, the woods are full of wild men who turns

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out to be Tellurium Woods; these here Jaspers goes riding in a hearse and bust up on a stump, and Mighty's dogs tries to bite the hand what feeds them. It's too much for one day, and—I'm going home."

"Arrest him, Bill!" whoops Mighty, hopping up and down on the roof, "I demands his arrest for stealing my clothes! Make him take 'em off!"

"What clothes?" asks Magpie, grinning. "These ain't your clothes."

I recognizes Tellurium's striped shirt and gray hat.

"Are you going to arrest him, Bill?" yelps Mighty, and Bill turns in his saddle.

"Mighty, you had him dead once to-day, and you sure caused me a lot of excitement. Shut up!" and he rides away.

We gets some clothes on the professor and doctor and loans Mighty an old pair of overalls. Old Testament and family leaves without any sort of a benediction, and the survivors sets down on the steps to tell each other how it was done. We just gets started when Tellurium Woods shows up. He's sure got an assorted lot of clothes on, and he's some mad. He stops in front of Magpie, and glares like he'd love to eat the whole Simpkins tribe.

"You long-complected cross between a lodge-pole and a burglar!" he howls. "You swiped my clothes! Can't an honest man go in swimming without having his clothes stole? You told them fellers where to find me, too—dang your hide!"

"He took my clothes by force," whines Mighty. "I never done nothing to him and——"

"Give me that two hundred dollars, Ike," orders Tellurium. "She's mine. Magpie didn't stay the stated time, so I win."

"So?" grins Magpie. "Don't get hurried, Ike. Tellurium, do you remember a pie you baked a short time ago, and——"

"You stole it," chuckles Tellurium. "You'd lose on that alone, Magpie. I'll take that money and——"

"Pie?" asks the professor, "I—I stole a pie, and lost it. I don't——"

"Wait," grins Magpie. "When you filled that crust, Tellurium, you must have stuffed it regardless, 'cause inside I finds this here communication, which I presume was written by a party what is now present. I'll read it to you."

He hauls out a sticky-looking piece of paper, and clears his throat. Here's what she says:

> Chased him all day but didn't catch him. If I don't get him to give up tomorrow I'll borrow Doughgod's bear dogs. If I do you will have to give me twenty-five instead of fifteen dollars.

"How do you like that, Tellurium?" grins Magpie. "I thought that in our agreement we were to confine the knowledge to three of us."

Tellurium looks blank-like at everybody, and then glares at Mighty.

"My gosh!" snorts Mighty. "Didn't you get that note, Tellurium? You wasn't home, so I stuck it under the top crust of that pie. I put it there so nobody but you would find it. You said for me to let you know about it."

"Well, what do you think about it now?" grins Magpie.

"Think?" Tellurium scratches his baldhead for a moment. "Think? I ain't thinking—no more. I know one thing; the next bet I make I don't assist in no way. I'm going to let nature take her course."

"Plenty coarse enough, too," agrees the doctor, rubbing his hip.

"Yeaus, of course," agrees the professor.

"Naturally," says Magpie.

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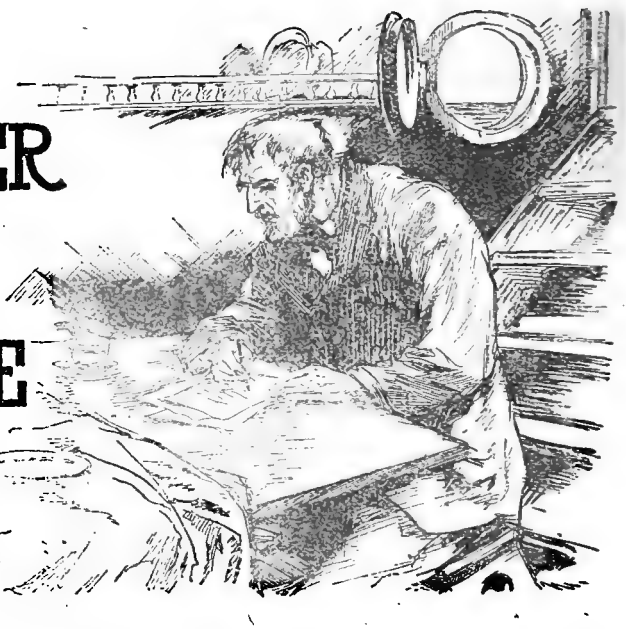
A FLUTTER IN SALVAGE

by H P Holt



OLD Robin Cobb sat in the cabin of the hundred - ton schooner *Maggie*, beads of perspiration trickling down the sides of his long thin nose, while he figured and figured with a stub of pencil on the fly-leaf of a nautical almanac. It came hard. Arithmetic had never been his strong point, and he was trying to reckon whether he could afford to carry out a project that was bothering him.

There were islands in those waters about which Captain Cobb knew all there was to know, though no chart in the world indicated their whereabouts; there was not a dialect in use anywhere from the China Sea to Peru of which he knew nothing; and in his little schooner, with four Tonga deckhands, he had weathered the worst storm that had swept the Southern Pacific in fifty years.

Robin Cobb was a trader, with curious ignorance of the ways of shore-going folk, a profound belief in his Maker, and deep faith still in the strength of his own right arm though that same right arm was not as strong as it had been. Robin was growing old. There were no illusions left for him on the subject of the sea.

He knew it had a fascination all its own, else why had he stayed on it and fought it for three score years while other men spent their evenings in a comfortable arm-chair in front of the stove at home? And he had a stove at home, and a wife who kept house patiently, gazing out to sea sadly sometimes, always hoping for the day, of which Robin had so often spoken, when he might "get ahead of the game" and settle down in comfort for the Autumn of his days.

"Three months it would take, or maybe five," he muttered, " 'cording to the weather. An' I don't know as I've got funds to stretch far enough. It'd cost a power of money, one way an' another."

He scratched his chin through his silvered beard. There was nobody whom he could consult. There never was. A trader in the South Seas learns through sheer grilling facts what self-reliance can mean.

"Five months!" he repeated pensively.

For this was the threshold of his most prosperous season in the South Seas.

Suddenly he thumped the table till the dishes rattled.

"Goldarn it, why didn't I write to Hep?" he exclaimed. "He'll do the trick just as well as me going all the way back to America, and maybe it'd save me a wasted trip too. I'll tell him all about it."

An expression of great relief swept over Captain Cobb's face. Hepsiah Grant was as an own brother to the skipper. If any man on earth was to be trusted that man was Hep. And Hep, being a lawyer, knew the ropes, too, which was more than Robin

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could say of himself. He would be like a child in arms if he fell foul of city sharks. With his old gray eyes shining, the skipper fished in a locker for pen, ink and paper. They were strange tools to him. Now and again he had to sign a receipt, or at intervals he scrawled a letter laboriously to his wife, otherwise he fought shy of handling a pen.

But this time was a great, a really important, occasion. His tongue protruded, and he contorted his legs in the agony of it. Sentence after sentence came in travail. Now and then he brushed away beads of perspiration that gathered on his forehead and trickled down to his bushy eyebrows but he persevered grimly. A blot here and there held no terrors for him. Letters Robin wrote always were adorned with blots. The appearance of the thing did not deeply concern him.

What he was serious about was to make sure that Hep would understand the facts, and by the time Robin got through with it he was rather proud of the missive. It lacked nothing in detail. Robin intended to run into the port of Sydney a few months later, so he gave the address of his agent there, and finally, amid the débris of dinner, he addressed an envelop to Hepsiah Grant while a corner of the letter lingered lovingly in the molten substance known as canned butter.

A week later the missive was mailed in Australia, and Robin felt a great load taken off his mind. Now he could pursue his vocation without tossing uneasily in his bunk o' nights wondering what he ought to do. He went a-trading in "the islands" for many weeks, and frowned darkly on returning to Sydney to find no letter from Hep. Then he made another trip. This time he had to go farther afield, and he grew curiously fidgety on the run back to Sydney, for if Hep had answered his letter at all the reply must be there now.

But there was no reply waiting for him, and Robin became deeply dejected. He knew well enough how difficult it was to persuade shore-going folk to interest themselves in a good thing far off the beaten track. But, surely, he thought, in a case like this . . . .

Robin tried to forget the matter, but it refused to be forgotten, and gradually a great resolution gathered shape within him. It was now two years since the beloved soil of New England had been under his feet. He owed it to his wife to see her once in two years, though that was a debt he had not always been able to pay. Also, he reflected, once he got hold of Hep's buttonhole he would make him understand what a fine proposition this was.

One good talk was worth a dozen letters. Perhaps Hep had thought so far that it was a sort of joke. Robin contracted his brows at the idea. Yes, surely, he must make a trip to New York. He had endeavored to make some arrangement with an Australian salvage company, but they were too grasping for Robin's liking, demanding much more than the lion's share, so he abruptly dropped the matter so far as they were concerned.

Eventually he stocked up the larder of the *Maggie* and turned her old nose east. For four weeks he and his Kanakas hung on to life by a miracle off Cape Horn, where Nature herself seemed to be trying to drive him back; but the *Maggie* weathered it and Robin's spirits rose as he ran up the Atlantic. Every day brought him nearer to New York. There he would find people with sense enough to see a fortune staring them in the face.

MANHATTAN rather bewildered him, as it always had done, but he set his teeth and plunged in. And then he made a discovery which, though it was disconcerting, explained why no letter had come from Hepsiah Grant. Hep was far away from New York. Months ago he had gone down to Buenos Aires on important business, and there was no telling when he would come back. This much Robin learned from a bright and impudent boy whom Hep had left in charge of the office.

The old skipper wrote to his wife in Maine, promising to join her soon; but meanwhile he set out to see if he could discover a sympathetic pair of ears in Gotham. He found there was a concern named the Universal Salvage Company with an office near the Battery, and without much hope he approached the gentleman who presided over its destinies.

Mr. Quinton Twist was perfectly polite, and smoked a long and thick cigar adorned with an ornate band while he listened.

"It's a salvage job I want to tell you about," began the skipper of the *Maggie*.

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"I was lying in ten fathom of water among the Tokelau Islands when one of my deckhands reported there was a wreck lying right underneath our quarter. I didn't take any special notice at first, 'cause you'll find plenty of other people's troubles of that kind if you look for 'em in the Pacific.

"But I was doing business with some niggers on the island near, and I asked the chief there what he knew about the wreck. It was a steamer that had foundered with all hands in a gale twelve months before. Some of the crew tried to get ashore, but their boat was smashed up on the coral reefs, and the men in it all lost their life. Their broken small boat was washed up on the beach and it's there now. I saw the name on the bow. It belonged to the *Perim Queen.*"

Up to this point Mr. Quinton Twist had not been stirred by the narrative. Now he plucked with a nervous little movement at a seal on the end of his watch chain. Those who knew Mr. Quinton Twist were aware that that was a sign he was becoming greatly agitated.

Robin was impressed by Mr. Twist's establishment, by Mr. Twist's manner, and by Mr. Twist's kindly interest, and he spoke with an open heart.

"You remember the *Perim Queen?*" he asked with anxiety he could not conceal.

"Vaguely—vaguely," agreed Mr. Quinton Twist.

"Why—you remember," Robin urged, "she was known as the platinum boat after she was lost. Pretty nigh a quarter of a million dollars' worth of platinum there was in the strong room next the skipper's cabin, and no trace of her was ever found after she left Sydney."

Mr. Twist's brain was working harder than it had been worked for many a year, although some queer deals passed through his hands occasionally.

"That's so," he said with an affable smile, pushing the cigars across the desk. "I don't know whether we can do anything with it, but I'm glad to have heard your yarn. I'll put the matter before our expert adviser. The South Seas are a long way from Broadway, you must understand, Captain. And, besides, the wreck may have broken up by now."

"It couldn't," replied Robin, with a pleased expression. "She's lying snug in ten fathom, at the entrance to a lagoon, half a mile off the shore, and all the gales in a century couldn't move her now."

Mr. Twist drummed his manicured fingers on the top of the mahogany desk.

"You see it only from your point of view, Captain," he said. "The cost of sending a salvage steamer to the Tokelaus would be considerable, and when she got there they might not find the wreck."

"Couldn't miss it even if they went blind, deaf, dumb and bughouse," snapped the skipper. "Eighty-one miles due east of Panta Island there's a little island called Kiki. Just eighteen miles east-sou'-east of Kiki there's the island where the smashed boat was washed up. There's only one lagoon there, and I fixed two buoys over the wreck, on chains, and they'll stop there till the crack o' doom."

Mr. Twist made a careful note of these interesting facts, promised Robin he would give the matter attention, and requested him to call again in a week.

Robin would not have felt so lighthearted had he known what happened even before he regained the jostling crowd in Broadway. Mr. Twist unrolled a chart of the South Pacific and, his finger trembling a little with suppressed excitement, he located the places of which Captain Cobb had spoken. Then he sat back in his chair for five minutes, his brows contracted.

"That man was telling the truth," he muttered aloud at last. "A chance like this hasn't come my way for ten years. I'll have a flutter."

Whenever Quinton Twist decided to act he did so definitely, firmly and usually with no trace of a conscience. This was, he realized, a gamble, but if he were any judge of human nature, it was a good gamble. Every one knew the story of the lost *Perim Queen.* Every one—every one, that is, in the shipping world—knew of the efforts that had been made to find some trace of the wreck. But the ship had disappeared utterly and completely.

On her voyage she had had to pass somewhere near the Tokelaus. Mr. Twist reflected that it would be lunacy to let such an opportunity slip through his fingers. Moreover, if he were going to tackle the thing, delay would not only be foolish but dangerous. He was badly in need of a vacation and had been wondering where to go. This settled it.

He wrote a long telegram to his agents

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in San Francisco, ordering them to charter a steamer to be ready to sail in six days, and giving other necessary instructions. Then he pressed an electric bell and sent for his head clerk.

"I'm going away for a while," he said. "There's nothing special you will want me for, is there?"

"No, sir," replied the head clerk.

"By the way," Mr. Quinton Twist added casually, "you remember the queer-looking bird who was in my office a while ago?"

"The old skipper with white whiskers?"

"Yes. Well, when he calls again, tell him I have decided not to interest myself in the proposition he spoke about," said Mr. Twist with a granite face.

ROBIN COBB, feeling certain that he had safely launched the greatest event of his business career, lost no time in hurrying to the bosom of his family. Mrs. Cobb, who had ever known her husband as an unfortunate optimist, nodded her gray head gravely as he told her the story of the *Perim Queen*, and for a moment she half-allowed herself to be carried away by hope. Then she smiled indulgently. Too often had she listened to his fairy-tales; too often had her high hopes been shattered.

"Maybe you haven't heard about Cap'n Turner?" she said gently, after a while.

"Old Bob Turner? No, what's happened to him?"

"Nothing, only he's given up traipsing all over the world, and settled down as skipper of a coasting schooner. He gets home, now, 'bout once every other week. He makes a good enough living and—say, Rob, it's mighty lonesome for me here without you. Some day maybe you'll go off and never come back from the Pacific. Couldn't—couldn't you get fixed up with a coast job, like Cap'n Turner did? Every other week his wife sees him——"

"One trip more, Maggie," said Robin. "I know it's hard, but I 'xpect I'll have to help with this salvage job, an' after that p'raps there won't be no more going away. It'll be every day and all day I'll see you then, and that's better than every other week, eh?"

Mrs. Cobb shook her head sadly, and tried to absorb some of her husband's optimism on the subject of the *Perim Queen*, but it was a dismal failure.

When the week was up the skipper took the train for New York, little dreaming that at that moment Mr. Quinton Twist was sailing out of San Francisco on a specially chartered steamer, with the object of jumping the *Perim Queen* claim and netting a fortune for himself.

The old captain blinked once or twice when the head clerk of the Universal Salvage Company delivered his terse message.

"But—but," he said, twiddling his hat in his hands, "I kinda thought Mr. Twist was going to take the matter up."

"That's all I know," said the head clerk bluntly; and once more Captain Cobb found himself an atom in the Broadway stream of life.

Beneath its tan, his face was a shade paler, and the lines on his forehead were a trifle deeper. For the first time he felt that there was something almost forlorn about his position. His natural optimism had misled him once more.

"Goldarn it!" he muttered, standing on the edge of the busy sidewalk as the human tide surged.

Then he sauntered on slowly, with bent head, thinking hard. There were other salvage concerns he could try. There must be men in New York City who would listen to him. He had just decided to make a list of all the people in the city who might suit his purpose, and tour their offices, when it occurred to him to leave a message at Hepsiah Grant's office.

He shot up the elevator to the lawyer's office and emitted a curious little noise, half-joy and half-surprise, when he found himself face to face with his old friend.

"Hep, son, there's something I want you to do for me," he said eagerly.

"Well, for the love of Mike leave me your address this time," replied the lawyer, with a broad smile, gripping the sailor's hand. "Nobody could make it out on that letter you sent me about the salvage job, as the corner had been smeared with grease or something. Otherwise I'd have cabled you the good news."

Robin gulped.

"Good—" Then he stopped and gulped once more. "Good news?" he asked.

"Sure. Platinum has gone up in value. It's worth a hundred dollars an ounce today, and they've rescued every bit of it that went down on the *Perim Queen*."

"*Who* rescued it?" asked the skipper,

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bellowing as though at sea in a gale of wind.

"The salvage company I handed the matter over to. Now don't look upset. Your interests are covered, in an agreement that's as safe as mortal lawyer could frame, and you're on a fifty-fifty basis. Rob, you've hauled in a pile of money over this business. Now listen, if you're in need of a little ready cash, don't hesitate to say so, and I'll make out a check right now."

Captain Cobb blinked hard.

"That's mighty kind of you, Hep. I—I guess I would like some—about a handful, just to show to the missis. But—say, Hep, are you sure you've got the stuff?"

"Sure? Why?"

"Well, because only this week I've been trying to fix up some arrangement with the Universal Company about it."

"You didn't sign anything, I hope," said the lawyer quickly.

"No. They wouldn't have anything to do with me. But that doesn't matter now, eh? Say, Hep, I—I guess I'll beat it up home."

AT ABOUT the hour a train was bearing Robin rapidly from New York, Quinton Twist was pacing the bridge of a steamer bound for the Tokelau Islands, with a smile of anticipation on his face. Robin, too, was smiling

THE TROUBADOURS OF NEGROLAND

BY THOMAS S. MILLER

IN THAT stretch of country behind the Gold Coast known as Negroland—that land of feudal chiefs and overlords, of sultans, emirs, sarikis, and where Mohammedanism, paganism and the *juju* gods are in such a hopeless jumble—the troubadour is as important to the social order as he was in medievalism. Like the professional beggars of Sokoto, the minstrel inherits his profession from his father, who inducts his son into its mysteries with deep secrecy. These minstrels go up and down the land with their tom-toms and *gilaus*, a primitive instrument made of a dry-seeded gourd with a couple of twanging strings, singing of tribal heroes and telling marvelous tales, in which devils and obsession and witchcraft play a large part without straining the credulity of the blacks.

The minstrel is open to hire to beat his tom-tom for an impromptu "mammy dance," for which he passes around a calabash for contributions which run to cowry-shells, plantains, honey-cakes, mealies, trinkets. It is a common sight to see a score or more Africans squatting on their heels around a troubadour, completely lost in his singsong story, which he accompanies on his *gilau*, rolling the dry seeds in a way to imitate the patter of rain on leaves, the soft swish of the river, wind rustling through the forest, the cries of children. He chants of tribal heroes of old, but makes the same story and the same hero fit the tribe he happens to have for audience.

He is as welcome in the villages as a circus, and if he has a monkey or hyena prancing on a rope he is almost a top-notcher, but not quite. The top-notcher minstrel has an awful reputation for *juju*, that is to say, witchcraft and ability to drive out devils and cast out sickness at will. Many carry a side-line and do a thriving business in charms against magic and the evil eye, antidotes to poison and herbs.

A big chief will hire a minstrel to sing his praises through his village, to intone fulsomely of his bravery, riches, charity. The whites hire him to tom-tom the marching carriers, for the African loves to march to drum and song. When the column is sulking to the verge of mutiny the minstrel is more potent than the head-man's hippo thong. He will beguile the ache in their legs with a story. He disseminates news, and, as the Nigerian police learned, he disseminates mischief.

It was discovered that many were propagandists for secret societies among the blacks whose object was to expel the whites from West Africa. But on the whole he is a harmless, amusing faker, getting a living the easiest way he knows how and often the dupe of his own occult jugglery.

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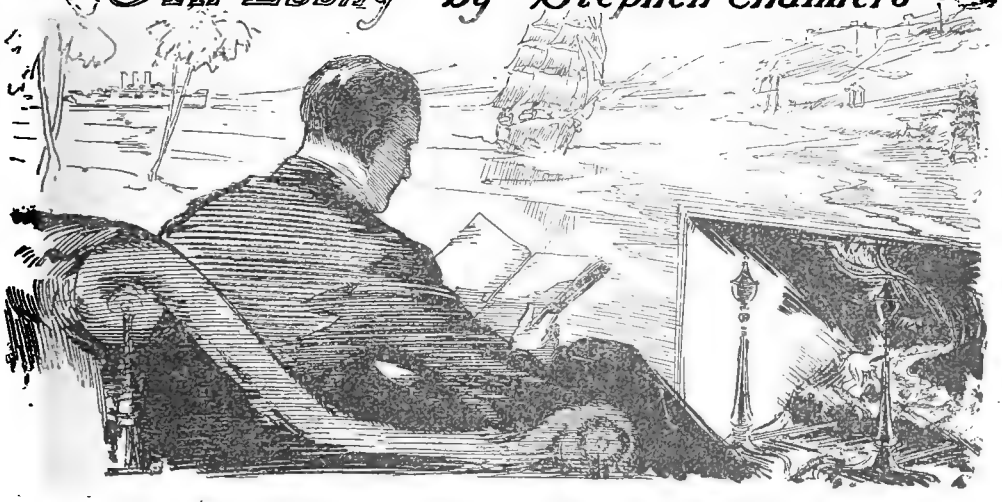
THE ADVENTURER OF THE HEARTH

An Essay by Stephen Chalmers



Author of "Chaplain to the Buccaneers," "The Great God Ananzi," etc.

Dedicated to All Those Who Live a Thousand Adventures in Their Easy Chairs

MOST of us who have to work ordinarily hard for a living have little time or means for travel. We can hie to lands remote only once in a great while; and few of us ever get beyond Havana or Paris. Yet when one considers the matter from the philosophic viewpoint of necessity, it seems almost wasteful to spend money on foreign travel for no other reason than "for to see this world so wide;" for without ever stirring from home, we all know all about it. The least of us has become a mightily traveled person upon the knowledge of adventurous seas and strange lands which the reader may store away during the evenings by the hearth or the steam radiator.

It is not first-hand knowledge, but experience has taught many an actual adventurer that first-hand knowledge is a little disappointing; that it lacks the romance of prospect or retrospect. It is a confusion of many pictures, while second-hand knowledge—such as one distils from impressions of reading—is a well-focused moving-picture to be worked at will and leisure.

By the time afterthought has retouched the negatives of actual memory and the picture's high lights stand out free of blur, the man of actual travel experience, although he may have seen the "Sultan's turret in a noose of light," is not much better off than your traveler of the hearth, whose impressions of far-off things flash up stronger as further books on similar subjects come to his fireside.

It is true that your actual traveler and adventurer is often surrounded by a wide-eyed, curiously questioning knot of untraveled brothers of the hearth. This was very much the case in former days before every field had its organ of publicity. It was still more so before books came to bless at all, when "the sailor home from the sea" was a returned Columbus, and "the hunter home from the hill" his own horn.

Your actual traveler of today is a very inconsiderable person; and he must be a very cautious one. Your greatest traveler as a rule is your briefest talker, for there is so little he can tell that is without precedent, that is not quite overshadowed by the great precedent—so little that has not already paid royalties to author-adventurers who have made a specialty of digging up in outlandish places all that is interesting or entertaining in outlandish things. In fact, your ordinary actual adventurer often knows less than the traveler of the fireside.

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The latter has acquired his information—in books—directly from the traveler and adventurer extraordinary. What his particular authority has to say on his subject is said because it is something—if only a viewpoint—which nobody else has discovered or put forward, about something in which he is peculiarly expert.

The day of a traveler's published diary of his "Trip to Cuba" is past. The discovery of a dubious river and the story of its exploration—ah, that is another matter: that is adventure in the true, luring sense. What a pity there are so few dubious rivers and doubtful valleys left! But your adventurer of the hearth is not much interested in the personal impressions of the ordinary tourist, unless his style of narrative, his little touches of observation, be marked by the charm of a Hearn or a Loti.

The traveler of the hearth, for whom in the last analysis most books are written, is a very educated person and scorns ordinary textbooks. He has circumnavigated the globe without budging from home; he has explored dark regions and conquered frozen peaks without removing his carpet slippers, and he has shot big game in every part of earth's wilderness without pulling a trigger. In fact he had tired of the latter pastime and is now, perhaps, engaged in photographing fierce animals it used to be exciting enough to shoot.

He is less interested today—having read and tabled it yesterday—in the study of a people never heard of until ten years ago than in something he knows nothing about, or just as little as the other fellow—as, for instance, whether there is life, and what kind of life, on Mars, or what is the nature of that gravity-opposing force which makes all living things rise away from it. Wo then to the traveler or adventurer of actual experience who spins a rash yarn in the presence of this dangerous critic of the fireside.

He is quite confident in his knowledge, too, as he has a right to be. He lends you a book with quiet enthusiasm and says:

"You ought to read this. Here's a fellow knows Italian peasant life."

Yet he himself has never been nearer Italy than Mulberry Bend, New York, or a bottle of Chianti made in California. But he has read other works on the same subject and has applied intelligence and logic in the comparison that makes for conviction and almost certain knowledge.

IN YOUR own case you pick up, say, one of Conrad's stories. Before you are through one chapter you find yourself back in your old adventure-land in the far seas, meeting old friends and familiar types made just a little more fascinating, watching the kaleidoscope of the "beach" and the jungle-walls of tropic rivers, hearing the eternal hum of the "trades" and the surf and reveling once more in the familiar Pacific with its atolls, coconut palms and schooners.

You, yourself, were one of the wanderers in "Omoo." *Herman Melville* was the other. You were that same *Marlow* in Conrad's red-blooded "Youth." You distinctly recognize yourself as one of the three vagabonds in "The Ebb-Tide." Stevenson was one of the other two.

You take up a novel by the late Jack London, or a fishing yarn by Charles Frederick Holder, or an outdoors essay by Henry Van Dyke. At once you discover—without any amazement—that you already know all about the battling brute-man of the frozen places, have previously experienced the thrill of fight with the leaping tuna and have sensed the simple joy of exploring "Little Rivers."

Personally, I know what it is to be a king with the earth at my feet; so do you. My back is scarred with the whiplash and my hands calloused by the oars of the galley in which I was chained. I have committed murder, suffered the agonies of conscience, the dread of ignominious death—and experienced it, too, I know—and you know—that horrible tolling of the prison bell and the impulse to struggle when the man comes to pinion your arms.

But one might go on forever discovering old experiences in new books, and one need not agree with one of Herman Viele's characters who stated that there were only seven plots and thirty situations. Rather coincide with that wiser man who said that "to the making of books"—and situations—"there is no end." And why should you not know as much about the flora of Ghongo Island, or the habitat of the Blue Sloth, as this fellow who is writing about either, adding all his knowledge to all that you knew before? Why not, if you have any memory, any imagination, brains enough to receive and retain an impression?

Why should not you, and I, and all of us who adventure by the hearth, not know all

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about every land and people under the sun when so many books of the best impressions —so many tales that are the outcome of strange conditions—by trained observers and actual adventurers have been, and are being, laid before us? And every land not always under the sun, too!

For to such perfection have enterprise and skill brought the art of photography that what we have not seen of the Arcti and the Antarctic neither Peary, nor Amundsen, nor Scott ever saw. Also, the moving picture has so capped the business that even the people who in darkness sit may see the world turn 'round, exhibiting to the sun its many-sided phases.

The objection may be raised that it is one thing to see with the eyes, another thing to see merely with imagination. To this one might mildly retort that it is a great thing to see with imagination and a rather sad business to see merely with the eyes. A friend of mine who made a world-tour sent me picture post-cards from every port at which he touched—pictures of pagodas, palms, mosques, sampans, sitting Buddhas, and so forth. On each post-card he wrote: "We leave here tomorrow. Arrive Port —— on such and such a day."

He seemed ever to be endeavoring, not to get somewhere—which is the true spirit of adventuring—but to get away from where he was. And when he came back and I asked him to tell me what he thought about it all, his reply convinced me that he had not paid out money for the privilege of thinking, but of seeing.

"Didn't you get my post-cards?" he asked.

I learned afterward that he had been disappointed in his tour. He had found the world no different from the descriptions of it he had read in books! Now, to most intelligent persons it is one of the delightful surprises of life that when we ultimately visit a strange land, the impression gathered is almost precisely that which we gained from books, although why it should be surprising Heaven only knows, unless we consider all men, especially authors, liars.

If the fulfilment of eager expectation falls short in anything it is probably because we can not appreciate in a short time the many things—with their inwardness—which it took the writer of that description or story years to discover for us. If it is the book that falls short, why then—there's room for another book on the same subject, and we are the person to write it!

Few persons realize, when they go forth actually adventuring for the first time, how much is due that retiring person, the author. We think the place and the conditions so novel, so diverting; yet we are filled with that delighted surprise at our own perspicuity, our swift comprehension of all that we see. It is quite remarkable how quickly we become cognizant of the human types, their humors, manners, peculiarities of taste, the curious architecture of their buildings and, in the outdoor realm, the phases of nature, even to the indigo hue of sea and sky, swiftness of dawn and dusk.

If we would consider for a moment—though Heaven forbid that we should destroy any illusion—we are merely adventurers of the hearth come home to the wonderlands of many a night's dream, to the actual that we visited in story. The success of Kingsley's "At Last!" is due largely to the fact that he conceived his West Indies before he ever saw them and was enthusiastic to find his preconceptions from what he had read so accurate. The very title of that book is eloquent of the spirit in which he approached those "islands that were the Hesperides."

It is human to forget what we owe our forerunners on the long trail, and out of this human weakness we are moved to write that book all over again, saying precisely the same things, with perhaps the refreshing touch of new relish, and all the time believing we are the original discoverers of such scenes and conditions—until some satirical critic makes remarks. Thus does a happy conceit make plagiarists of us all!

But the adventurer of the hearth is not always able to verify his book impressions of the world of scenic splendor and romantic suggestion. No matter what one may say by way of consolation he will still yearn, the more he reads, to experience the actual. He will be none the less a mighty traveler, however, none the less informed about the world if his hope is never realized.

The realization of all dreams is more or less disappointing, but this sense of disappointment in adventure is not without its advantages. It whets the appetite for more, and here may be the partial explanation of my post-card traveler. It is this disappointment that urges the desire to discover the mythical El Dorado a little

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further up the stream, the Fountain of Youth over the next hill. Columbus suffered, or enjoyed, this whetting sense of disappointment, as did Raleigh, Ponce de Leon and de Soto; and these were mighty adventurers.

Yet thrice-blessed is the adventurer of the hearth who, having read much and to advantage in his youth, finds himself actually embarked. He is determined, of course, to discover just what he conceived from stories of the particular place which he is about to see. If times should be a little changed there, what matter? The stage setting will be pretty much the same, and surely there will be one Bedouin on the landscape, one vulture in the zenith, one shrine on the hillside, or one lion at the pool to establish the preconceived atmosphere. For the rest he will reconstruct and repopulate the place from the creatures of his educated imagination.

IMAGINATION plays a great part in this as in the enjoyment of all things in life. After all, the world is only as the individual imagines it, as he conceives and sees it. There is, for instance —or was—no drearier prospect in the world than the Isthmus of Panama. Let your imaginer step ashore at Colon and upon the instant that town will be the Chagres of other days. In the hospitals and among the canal workers he will hear Harry Morgan's buccaneers bawling for rum. He will give a thought to unhappy de Lesseps, or to the California emigrants staggering, fever-crazed, over the old trail by Cruces to the Pacific.

Or his imagination may travel further back and he, himself, will climb a tree somewhere in Darien and, settling the matter for all time whether it was Drake or Balboa or Cortez who did it before, stare amazed upon the vast bubble of the Pacific and pray God that he live long enough to sail a ship there! Then, with all the fury of Morgan and his starving army, your gentle adventurer from the hearth will descend upon the luckless city of Panama, sack her riches, profane her churches and wind up with a fiery holocaust!

This is merely an illustration of how one may enjoy himself in a place he has read about and never seen before. As a personal instance of this pleasure of living in preconception, the island of Jamaica was to me a center of romance after reading "Tom Cringle's Log." Upon my honor as an adventurer of the hearth, I swear that fifteen years ago I met *Tom Cringle, Aaron Bang, Paul Gelid* and all the rest of that gay company in old Kingston—aye, and waxed convivial with them, too, until one of them—was it *Aaron Bang?*—fell under the table just as he used to do in the book!

It took me some time to realize that it was the twentieth century on that island. The awakening came with the discovery of a brass plate overlooking the sea at Port Royal—after a pleasant afternoon astride a dismantled gun and in conversation with a little priest named Père Labat who, hundreds of years ago, was chaplain to the buccaneers. The brass plate said that here walked Horatio Nelson—upon a dryland quarter-deck whence he spied for the French who never came—and advised all who walked in his footsteps to remember his glory.

Then I knew that Nelson was already born and long dead, that my little, weazened, godly, humorous Père Labat was but a ghost and that *Aaron Bang* and all the rest of Michael Scott's book-people were one with the spirits they drank. To their memory I regretfully turned down an empty glass—after clinking it with a buccaneer's pewter at the Hellfire Tavern!

But think of that dream of days—all because I was an adventurer of the hearth. The tourists with pith helmets and white umbrellas did not so enjoy Jamaica. As *John Silver* says—ye may lay to that!

It may arouse something in the American breast to hear that in Scotland, where the nights are long and the adventure club flourishes by the hearth, some quite adult persons like to think that cowboys shoot up Broadway, New York, at intervals! Well—quite adult Americans sometimes lightly imagine that Scotland is a place where kilted savages spend their evenings drinking *usquebaugh*, reading the Psalms and Paraphrases as approved by the Scotch Kirk, and working out jokes by algebra.

It was only the other day that an American woman, about to accompany her husband to Russia, confided to a friend—

"I know I shall either be frozen to death or sent to Siberia!"

She had adventured by the hearth, but not enough. She had but an elementary conception of her subject. But we would

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ill find it amusing and interesting to recall our first "visits" to foreign places.

Before I had been there I could never think of Ireland without rain or a desolate pig on a bleak hillside—or was it a lurking Fenian?—or of Germany without a band playing in discord—cheeks all inflated—at every street corner, and stiff soldiers doing the goose-step or woodenly saluting. Vienna was conceived in the juvenile mind as an interminable row of pastry shops, a fancy that may be traced to Vienna cakes. America was full of Indians, outlaws and heroes, and every man carried a brace of Colts, a bowie-knife and a repeating rifle.

It is entertaining to observe how we begin this adventuring by the hearth. The trail starts where we sit, circles and recircles the world, takes us to the lowest depths of human misery and leads us to the heights where sit the truly great and the seeming great; brings us to strange camps and the company of rough and fine fellows—all indiscriminately sociable; compels us to brave dangers in spirit and allows us to share in red-blooded conflict; lets us join in the laughter of comedies and weep over many a human tragedy that we encounter on the trail, which ends where it began.

This traveling, this adventuring, began long before we ever read a book. We first sallied abroad in the little stories that were invented to lull us to sleep. Then we went further afoot and wept with *Little Bo-Peep* over her lost lambs and their lost tails, licked our thumbs with *Little Jack Horner* over that Christmas pie, and shared *Little Miss Muffet's* horror over the spider which set down beside 'er.

Pictures were the next step afield—pictures that set the young mind off on the trail of story invention. This story invention is the first and highest form of hearthside adventuring. You, yourself, must have killed many a villain in the fire, or rescued a fair maid from the edge of a precipice—when she was nothing but a cinder balanced on the edge of a glowing coal.

You have been the villain, too. As a painted savage with what primitive delight you deftly removed a scalp! As a shrinking captive with what mingled feelings you felt the cold steel wipe across your throat or saw the blue-black ocean come up to meet you on the dipping piratic plank!

BUT returning to first voyages, there finally came that great step from tales which were read to us to the wonderland of tales that we read for ourselves. At first the reading was laborious. We skipped the "long parts" and delighted in the dialogue. Sometimes we wondered why men should waste time and toil writing such long, big-worded things that nobody understood, or cared to, anyway! And looking at our elders immersed in Shakespeare, Dickens, Thackeray, we wondered why they should read such things for entertainment—when it was so much better fun just to look at the pictures.

The great day came, however. Mine was when I found Mayne Reid's "The Headless Horseman" on a Summer bench and discovered that amazing form of literature—the novel—the wonderland of things that might be! Before that I had read nothing but the Bible and the Shorter Catechism. What a day that was—and the days that followed, when imagination, stirred from latency, was as ravenous as *Oliver Twist's* appetite. Columbus never felt more elated over his discovery of a new world.

So must the great day have come for most of us. It may have been a volume of Marryat, or Scott, or Stevenson, or Smollett—or Laura Jean Libbey. It may have been a striking picture that tempted us to know what it was all about. Whatever the tale, the veil was rent, and lo, the world—in books—was ours!

It has been a wandering discourse this. But in our hearth adventuring there are no parallels or poles, no nights or days. We jump from century to century, from land to land, "from earth to heaven," and there is but one rule in our wanderings—we must keep under cover.

But the traveling and the adventuring come to an end some day. Our steps grow feeble; the print must be larger, for the trail grows dim to our aging eyes; we have become gray and wrinkled from exposure in many a clime; the thrill of the adventure comes not so powerfully, for we have become veterans; and the camp by the last wellspring is not unwelcome.

The fire burns low, and presently it is time to roll ourselves in our blanket and sleep in the arms of Mother Earth. So let the benediction be upon the head of Ulysses, or whoever first went adventuring.

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THE BLACK LURE

By Charles Beadle

Author of "The Cave," "The Winged Avenger," etc.

MY STATION is on the Congo border of Uganda, within a mile of the equator. Save for the rare visit of the deputy commissioner and the biennial furlough to a chilly land where dwell an alien folk who are yet my people, but a people of strange habits and uncomprehended ways, my life for ten years and more had been to collect hut-tax and settle petty squabbles—which man had stolen a neighbor's goat, to whom belonged a plot of bananas, which old woman had not cast the evil eye upon another's child, whether Jakombi should pay Yakimbi eight rupees or ten for a new wife: monotonous enough since the king of Unoyoro—he of the sacred cows and the khaki coat labelled "Kabaka Kasagama" upon the collar—had sold his savage birthright for a mess of hut-tax pottage; yet a life which clothed the flattered ego in brief authority, made one like unto a petty king ministering unto these my children.

There was Wilkins of course, the lieutenant of the King's African Rifles. But we saw as little of each other as possible; for we had heard each other's stories and detailed lives, worn political opinions and jokes into shreds—besides his mustaches got upon my nerves, and once he had told me to my face that my nose disturbed his dreams.

The ground to the east is swamp, mostly papyrus sudd and strips of forest beloved of the elephant; but to the west the plateau breaks away in an escarpment with the Ruwenzori Mountains—Gamballagalla, as the natives call them—on our side and the Balegga Hills fifteen miles away on the other.

Many were the hours I spent staring across that great cleft which runs down the middle of Africa as if God's chariot had passed leaving as mighty puddles after rain the chain of lakes; watching as the sunset behind the violet hills for the queer lights and shadows upon the bamboo-clad foothills and the glints upon the snow-capped peaks; sometimes fascinated by the terrific storms of sepia, rent and jagged by lightning, rushing down that corridor like a mad rhinoceros from one lake to the other; waiting like a lover for those rare moments when like an Oriental beauty who drops her veil for one coquettish moment, the jealous mists would rise to reveal the pewter of the distant lake.

Uganda was familiar, known; across that other side—even in the boiling sun it appeared to be dark—were the mighty forests peoples, pigmies and okapi eternally weeping strange deaths. So it seemed in my longing.

One stewing day I had returned from the crater lakes and was sitting on my favorite

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rock laving my feet in an icy stream which gurgled from unknown heights. Before me the ground dropped two thousand feet to the bottom of the corridor. Where the Semiliki River ran like a golden sink pipe from one lake to the other, the Balegga Hills were deep violet streaked with the pale yellows of a brush fire. Just as I was watching the saffron sky deepen to red-gold and the snow-capped peaks of the Gamballagalla turn from steel blue through violet to blood my "boy," squatting with my gun and a brace of duck smoking a cigaret, exclaimed gutturally.

Over the edge of the rough trail like a *Jack in the Box* of Infinity appeared the figure of a man. He wore a beard yellow and two feet long, a hat of sorts made out of crudely thatched palmetto leaves; he was clothed in a ragged tunic of tarnished lace like a villain out of a comic opera, and beneath was a skirt of grass such as the Balegga wear—and the Tahitians. All this I saw in one startled glance as the man stopped and stared.

I became conscious only of that stare. My boy muttered something about a white man, startling me into action. As I rose the figure moved toward me making a curious noise in the throat which resulted in a falsetto—

"How d'you do?"

I took the hand which he proffered in a stiff yet exaggerated gesture as I heard my voice remarking:

"Oh fine, thanks. How are you?"

Jerking his head as if he were choking over a fishbone, he made the same throaty rumbling ending in the same ridiculous voice:

"Thanks! Beastly weather, isn't it?"

I struggled with an impulse to laugh. He continued to hold my hand and to stare as if he wished to devour me with his eyes. My God how he stared! I was utterly at a loss what to do. I wondered how long he was going to hold my hand, what he would do next. Then it dawned upon me that he had a touch of the sun. Yet his blue eyes were steady and sane enough. He continued to make more uncouth noises resulting in—

"Have a drink, old man?"

From the convulsions of the nest around his mouth and his eyes I gathered that he was smiling as he shook his head. He dropped my hand and broke into a torrent of speech in a native dialect of which I only understood a few words.

The tension was relaxed and I lost the idea that he was crazy. I replied in a local dialect, but he shook his head and began jabbering at my boy. Yalu listened as if resentfully. When he had finished the stranger turned toward me looking eagerly and smiling.

"He says," said Yalu, "that he is a white man of the same tribe as you are, but that he has lost his tongue. He wants to know whether he may look at you because it is a good medicine for his soul. He says will you speak to him in your own tongue because it is sweeter than fresh water to a parched throat. He says——"

The man who was standing, staring anxiously and as eagerly as a starving dog for a bone, broke out in a gust of words.

"He says," continued Yalu, imperturbably, "that if you will permit him to hold your hand again it will perhaps make him whole again; that the touch of kindred is sweeter than the wine of the palm."

Again I bagan to think that he had a touch of the sun, and when I held out my hand uncomfortably he snatched and to my horror held it to his lips. As in my embarrassment I hesitated what to do he dropped my hand and making more startling noises, squeaked out triumphantly:

"Drunk! By ——, I'm drunk!"

THEN tearing off his canopy of a hat, he tossed back his mane of hair and lifting his great beard burst into shrill giggles. For a moment I stared at that extraordinary figure in the grass skirt and tunic and wild locks heaving with mirth silhouetted against a continent framed in misty orange, and then I too began to laugh. Hysteria, I suppose it was. For when he ceased he had tears in his eyes.

"Beware," warned the imperturbable Yalu, "this man is bewitched."

For a moment we stood looking at each other shyly. I felt rather foolish.

"You had better come along up to the fort," said I.

"Yes," said he. "Oh yes, yes, yes."

"Er—have you got any porters? Where are they?"

"Porters! Porters!" he repeated joyfully. "Oh yes, porters!"

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He stood watching me eagerly as if ready to run on ahead like a shaggy sheep dog.

I saw that he did not understand and also realized that of course he hadn't any porters in such a condition. I smiled and beckoned. As he followed eagerly a metallic clink caught my ears. I could not determine what it could be until he walked out of the grass over a rock when I saw attached to his ankles the links of a broken chain; and on the whole of his legs visible to the thigh, the brown skin was streaked with scars. I was too engrossed wondering who he was and what had happened to him to speak until he jabbered at Yalu, who translated another request that I speak so that his ears might be made whole.

I chattered away as best I could pointing out the mountains and the path, any obvious thing. Whenever I was at a loss for a subject he would frequently catch at the last word I had said and repeat it joyfully parrotwise. I began to feel half-crazy myself. Once he stopped me and said:

"I know. I know. I remember." And tapping his chest: "Herbert Gibbons—me. I remember soon. Go on, please." Then he giggled delightedly. "That's right, what?"

I led him 'round to the front of the fort to avoid the native quarters. Somehow or other I didn't wish them to come out and stare at this strange creature. When he saw the houses he stopped and pointed saying:

"Fine. Fine. By ——." And then with a triumphant rush: "Well played, sir!"

The phrase corresponded with his accent. I saw him in a different light. You know what I mean. But my amazement increased as to how he had gotten into such a plight. A dozen wild ideas fled through my brain as we walked up the slope and across the moat into the fort. Perhaps he had been gun-running or heavens knows what, been caught by the Belgians and sent to Boma on the coast; a thousand mile trip through the forest which a white man seldom survives, for it saves them such a lot of bother, international inquiries and red-tape, if the prisoner dies, say of fever, on the road. Yet that would not account for the extraordinary loss of his mother tongue. But he might be suffering from aphasia brought on by his sufferings. He might have always been crazy. He might—I gave up the problem.

I could scarcely persuade him to cross the square of the fort to my bungalow for he wanted to stop and peer about like a curious child. And I feared that Wilkins would come and begin asking silly questions. So I hurried Gibbons inside to the hall—my bungalow is divided into three compartments—which served as a smoking lounge. Again he gazed about him as if he had never seen such a thing before.

"That's all right, old man," said I soothingly. "Sit down and we'll have a drink."

He obeyed grinning and lay out in the long chair with the stretchy relief of a tired animal.

"Feel better?" I added.

He frowned intently, passed his hands over his eyes and said with a smile, exultingly—

"Thanks awf'lly, old man."

A servant came in with a tray of whisky and glasses. Gibbons started up and positively glared while I poured a two-finger peg.

"This'll do you good, and then you'd like a bath, eh?" I was saying as I lifted the sparklet bottle when with a barked: "God!" he snatched the glass and gulped the liquor in one action.

Then he choked, laughed, spluttered, holding his throat, and lay back with a sigh. As soon as I had taken the glass from him he smiled slightly, murmured, "sorry," and closed his eyes again.

I smoked for a while, sipping my drink and waiting for him to stir. But he didn't. He seemed asleep. His absurd hat was a lump beside him on the floor. The broken rusty links around the ankles had made circles or sores, festering and half-healed; there was scarcely a whole patch of brown skin on those long legs. The ballet skirt of grass stuck out in an absurd fringe.

At length I tried to awaken him, but I couldn't. I didn't know quite what to do. Wilkins might have heard something about him and come over to poke his nose out of vulgar curiosity. Finally I called Yalu and we carried him into the spare bedroom. Together we tore off the pitiful grass skirt. When the ragged tunic, which almost fell apart in my hands, was removed I had to drink another whisky hastily.

His body was one mass of sores and half-healed wounds. I pulled myself together and sent for lint and stuff and we dressed him as well as possible. The fetters were so rusty that they were easily knocked off.

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Around his neck was a copper wire holding a native snuff-box made of rhinoceros horn. I took it away. Gibbons did not stir. He was dead drunk.

I gave orders that he should not be awakened. He slept for twenty hours.

OF COURSE Wilkins had heard of his arrival and came bothering about it in the morning. I merely told him that the man was sick and was not to be disturbed. He wanted to know all sorts of details and made idiotic surmises, but I cut him short. He grew sulky and went off.

When they told me that Gibbons had awakened I left the court and went to him. I found him lying on his elbow staring 'round the room. In answer he smiled wistfully and said slowly:

"I'm much better, thanks awfully." He frowned in effort and added: "It's so difficult. I can't find my words, doncher know. I—I—oh, Lord!"

I ordered coffee and eggs. He ate them ravenously, and when I offered cigarets he laughed that curiously infantile giggle I had remarked before, which made me feel queer. I placed the box beside him. He smoked one after the other and then he was sick. Again I hadn't realized the effect any drug would have upon a man in his pitiable condition. Then he fumbled around my pajama jacket. I guessed that he wanted the snuff-box.

When I gave it to him, he smiled and thanked me, tapped out snuff and inhaled with great gusto. I wanted him to have a bath, but he wouldn't. When I suggested that I would send for a Hindoo hairdresser he appeared to fly into a rage and then clutching his matted hair over his ear, said:

"I'm awf'lly sorry, old chap. No, that's not right. You know what I mean. I—oh damn!"

He slept well for the best part of three days, only waking to eat, snuff and sleep again. I soon learned that any attempt to recall words always distressed him. Although he permitted me to dress his sores and wounds every day he appeared ashamed of them. I gave him a pile of papers and magazines. He spent hours poring over them. I would sit with him for some time while he read, smoked very little, and had a whisky. Sometimes he would laugh to himself as he read. It was an awful job to resist trying to persuade him to give some account of himself but I was so sure that he appreciated my denial.

Wilkins grew more and more inquisitive and irritating. On the strength of having studied medicine for a year or so before he entered the service he demanded to see Gibbons. I refused. It was nothing to do with Wilkins anyway and if once I gave way he would be always in my bungalow twiddling his —— mustaches and giving me advice; besides Wilkins had practically nothing to do all day except drill his men and Gibbons might suddenly find his tongue.

But about a week after Gibbons' arrival I left the court one afternoon earlier than usual. On the veranda I found Wilkins and Gibbons. I was so angry that I could scarcely speak. Wilkins rose as I came up.

"Mr. Wilkins," said I, "when I wish to have the pleasure of your company, I will invite you."

"Oh, don't be an ass," exclaimed Wilkins. "Gibbons is so bored alone here all day that I ——"

"Mr. Gibbons is my guest and I am responsible for his health. I don't consider——"

"Oh, I say, please don't—don't what d'you call it? On my account," interposed Gibbons, "er—I'm only too pleased to have —er—a white man—er—to talk to. Forgive, I'm still devilish rusty, what?"

I was so flabbergasted at this comparative fluency that I could not say anything, except—

"Mr. Wilkins!"

"Oh all right, you idiot!" exclaimed Wilkins.

He threw his cigar over the rail and turning to Gibbons added:

"By by, Gibbons. Hope you have a good night. See you soon," and stalked off the veranda.

I sat down beside Gibbons saying:

"You must forgive me, but that fellow bores one to death. If you had been boxed up with a lunatic for two years and more he'd get on your nerves."

Gibbons smiled in his childlike manner as he said—

"Yes, almost as ratty as being alone for ten years!"

I stared at the strange creature.

"Yes, I know. I know. You two have

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lived alone for a long time. It is always the same, is'nt it? We who do that become a little—a little—crazy, eh what?"

"Well, I suppose Wilkins is a little——"

"And you? Ah, my boy we all do, and don't realize it. I will try to tell you some—something—that you will understand."

He sat quite still and stared queerly, holding his mane of hair over his ears looking like a bearded woman. I listened expectantly, wondering how much he had already told Wilkins.

"I got as far as telling you my name, what? Yes, that was the first thing I could recall. That was one of the greatest—greatest—tortures; trying to recall my own tongue. But I'm better now. That reading helped me a lot. You know—quickly—I wasn't laughing at the—the jokes, that sort of thing, but because I recognized word after word and each word seemed like—like——"

He paused and tugged irritably at his hair.

"A light?"

"Yes, yes, a little light—little lamp, that's it. And then—" He jerked his head toward Wilkins' bungalow— "he helped me a lot."

"Wilkins did?" I demanded. "How?"

"Association. I couldn't have done anything without association. I mean Wilkins is in the Service, and the sight of the uniform and the manner helped me more than anything."

"Oh."

"I might have got along in the line, but you know the cavalry mess, what? So I got seconded for West African service. Frontier force, you know. The devil—for me, I mean. I was at Acra for a bit. That's bad enough, God knows, after home service life. Then we had a little scrapping in the interior and I was stuck up there with two companies—on my own. I was there about three years. One gets a bit crazy, you know," he added apologetically and fell to staring across the fort with a queer expression.

I knew it. I had felt the same in my own eyes when I stared across the Semilki. I handed him the cigarets to recall him. He blinked as he took one absently, lighted it, threw it over the rail and took snuff.

"What a —— fool a man is," he commented, and fell to staring again.

"Yes, he is sometimes."

"WHAT? Take any impulse and water it sufficiently with environment and he'll go buzzing as blindly as a mosquito into a net. You don't know the Tchad country, what? Well, it's swamp and nothing but swamp—and scrub sometimes. But south it runs gradually into thicker bush until you get the Congo forest. You can't see anything but swamp and sky from Wadya—my station, you know. Swamp and sky. But we had a flagpole of course and one day I climbed the pole for sport. I could see the forest from the top.

"After that I couldn't leave the —— thing alone. I would climb up every evening like a —— monkey on a stick—just to glimpse that blue haze. Then I had a platform built. Had to have timber carried fifty miles to do it. There I used to spend most of my time. Just staring at the distant forest. Of course at that distance it was merely a blue haze, but to me it always appeared—black. Queer, what?"

"Very," said I, and I moved uncomfortably.

"I wanted to go and see it. You know that idiotic impulse Kipling talks about—'There's something lost behind the ranges, go and find it!' Some idiot would call it romance, I suppose, what?"

He tapped out more snuff, sniffed and fell to staring again.

"I was always pretty good at languages." He stopped suddenly and stared at me intently. "I like to look at you—and Wilkins. You remind me of Maidenhead and—you're both just the type around Bolters Lock."

He laughed. I frowned. I don't look in the least like Wilkins and his —— mustaches.

"What month is this?"

"July," said I, a little sulkily.

"My Lord, regatta week, I'll bet, what?"

I fidgeted.

"Well that's fifteen years ago or it may be twelve, I don't know. By the way what year is it?"

"Nineteen twelve."

"*Clk!*" He clicked in the native manner of astonishment. "I'm three years out."

"Did you go on to the Congo, I asked impatiently.

"What?" He took snuff again. "Hie!" he shouted suddenly and waved a hand.

Across the square was prowling the

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inquisitive Wilkins. I couldn't very well object as Gibbons had invited him, but... Wilkins sat down with a smug grin and twiddled those infernal mustaches. I expected Gibbons to run over the beginning of the story for Wilkins' benefit, but he had already heard it apparently for immediately the puppy began to talk service shop. I could have killed him. I listened for a while, then I rose.

"I think we'd better have dinner first," I suggested coldly and added, for I saw no chance of getting Gibbons to talk unless I did, "you'd better feed with us, Wilkins, if you care to?"

We went to the mess-room. Throughout dinner they continued to chatter, but I could not help remarking that Gibbons seemed to be growing better every moment; that ache in the eyes and the suggestion of haunting fear died away and was replaced by a keen vivacious expression.

I drank in silence. They both laughed and chattered as if they had forgotten me. At length I was so exasperated that I rose and went on to the veranda to smoke. The glow of sunset deepened to the twilight, which was snuffed out as one snuffs a candle. Then came Wilkins' voice from the darkness.

"I say, Glover, old boy, come and sit down; Gibbons is going to finish the yarn."

This was really insolence, but I had to swallow it. When the boy had brought the coffee and liqueurs, Wilkins added to Gibbons—

"Come on, old boy, let's have the yarn."

Gibbons laughed in that high-pitched tone, but although I couldn't see him in the gloom I observed that the laugh had lost that childish or hysterical giggle.

"Well I think that I told you, Wilkins," began Gibbons, "that I was rather good at languages. That was why they left me at Wadya. I got my local dialect fairly easily. The district commissioner was supposed to visit me twice a year in the dry season, but in the second year he didn't turn up. You know what it is with the Administration, what? My people are of pure Bantu stock from the Congo basin where in fact the main tribe is. In those long, hot days and evenings I would talk much with my people—one becomes a petty king draped in the trade beads of authority."

He laughed.

"That sort of thing—too much of it—is apt to go to the head—like wine. You lose perspective. In the first year I would swear and curse, wishing that I could get back to a more civilized post; but after—no, I began to dread the coming of a white, the coming of a greater authority than my own. You become insanely jealous of any sharing of that petty kingdom, what?"

I saw his head turn from Wilkins to me, knew that he was smiling.

"Just like any silly child I began to long for greater kingdoms. Perhaps that was at the back of my longing to go to those distant forests. Well, I know now that it was. God knows I've had plenty of time since to think it out—God, yes! Then another link was added to the chain of circumstances, I became absorbed in native mythology, theology—witchcraft, you know. I began a book on the system of Yawaga but——"

He paused. I heard the *sniff, sniff* of snuff-taking.

"You know the native has a fascinating way of thinking He thinks in child logic. Having no conception—as a child has none—of the abstract, he muddles up ideas in a curious way. Of course you two know that—I mean how—for instance—if one man gets a wrong idea from the tribal point of view—in his head, the witch-doctor will give him an emetic on the reasoning that the idea is inside him—obviously—and so that if they turn out everything that there is there the objectionable idea will be discarded as well."

"It seems funny to us. But, my God—and then—consequently there is always the tendency to confuse the king with a god. Sounds rather absurd, but after all the divine right of kings in Europe is the same bally confusion of thought. Of course every tribe has a slightly different system, but all on the same principle—more or less. What's the system here?"

"Oh," said I," the king here, Kasagama, is regarded as more or less sacred. I don't think he's quite regarded as a god. But they seem to hold him more or less responsible for the welfare of the people. He has sacred cows from which only he may drink—on the assumption that that which he touches or uses becomes sacred — and therefore dangerous to any commoner to use or even touch."

"Yes, you get practically the same system all over. In some cases it reaches

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the extreme where the king is god—and with their naive logic it is better to have a god close at hand than one up in the skies out of reach. The Yawaga had a modified system of this sort. But their parent tribe —away over there in the dark forests—had the top-hole thing. As you know, all these cults of the witch-doctors are guarded by secret societies from the common people.

"WELL, I became so absorbed in the study of their ways that I was prepared to go to any lengths to attain their complete confidence."

He moved uneasily in his chair.

"You know what this means—I—I became an initiate."

Involuntarily I muttered and I heard Wilkins murmur—

"Good God!"

"I know. Shall I go on?"

"Please!" I said, and my own voice sounded strange in the warm darkness.

There was silence for a moment in which I heard him sigh. Then he began again:

"Well, after that I became—not king, but chief witch-doctor. You know that was rather easy with the aid of—rather pitiful tricks—permanganate of potash—water into blood, you know—an electric battery—a gramophone—and a slight knowledge of medicine and surgery. So simple to their minds. For one who could make a fire from rubbing a splinter of wood against a magic box—well, one could not be even surprised at any miracle. And then they were only the sub-sect of the society. Down below—where the parent tribe dwelt, was—so they said—a god.

"They professed that they could not tell me what he was like, for no man had looked upon him. It was death so to do, they said. Naturally that excited me. I would ponder and wonder, and wonder and ponder. And somehow—perhaps I—well I did—I lost my sense of proportion. I began to believe—in a way—that—perhaps there might be—well, not a god, but something—some man possessed of abnormal powers. I didn't know. The credulous part in all of us, I suppose. There are more mysteries in heaven and earth, you know, and all that sort of thing. At least so it seemed—often—from the top of my platform staring at the place of darkness——

"Well, I—yes, and I think I did in a curious way—half of me as it were—begin to believe in my own—ridiculous powers. I—that's it! —— it, I became jealous of the reputation of that god.

"Nobody white to speak to—constantly under the influence of the black point of view. Really I suppose I began to see black. Then came a crisis in the inter-tribal affairs touching more particularly the main tribe. You see the French were gradually pushing east and using their influence to stop cannibalism, slavery, and the practise of the Sangha society. They had reached a point well within their territory. The doctors decided to hold—the god did apparently—I never quite knew, then—for the god issued oracles through the mouth of the holy priest.

"All the witch-doctors of the tribe and allied tribes were summoned. And I—as the head witch-doctor of the Yawaga—and district commissioner and captain of askaris —" he laughed, an echo of the previous giggle—"was bidden to come, was especially bidden to come. I think—of course, it flattered my crazy vanity, and I saw—oh I became unbalanced. Suddenly I saw black. I mean in the sense that my official position and all that civilization meant became as nothing. I wanted to see the god Sangha."

Again that idiotic giggle more pronounced, sending a chill through me. Wilkins' voice made me jump as he remarked—

"And you went, of course."

"Of course." Gibbons sighed and took more snuff. "Yes, I went. I arranged that it should appear that I had been eaten by a lion. Easy enough in my position—native influence. Merely went off shooting and sent back helmet and a remnant of my uniform by one of my own men—who would never dare to give me away.

"The excitement of beginning the journey brought back a little of the white I think, for I could hardly keep the frozen indifference necessary to my part. I felt like an excited schoolboy on breaking-up day. I had abandoned European costume altogether.

"At first I adopted a robe and turban as they were accustomed to Arab traders for centuries past. Well, all went very well. We arrived at the village of the god, Sangha. It's away on a slight plateau, but entirely surrounded by the thickest forest—three weeks forest trip on any side to get to it. A much bigger village than I had expected—ever seen. Quite a thousand huts. And right in the center dwelt the god.

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"His temple, whatever you like to call it, was surrounded by a double palisade as well as a powerful superstition—that to attempt to enter meant certain death. The witch-doctors saw to that. Took a victim now and again and mutilated him horribly—you know how—stuck the body on the palisade as if he had attempted to enter and called all the people to witness the wrath of Sangha.

"At the entrance to the magic circle was an ordinary hut where lived the servants of the god—all with their tongues tor out—eunuchs—to whom the priests brought daily offerings of meat, bananas. Yes, the god was human enough, for he ate well; but everything was specially grown or raised for him—all under the tabu—hereditary family who raised and herded cattle, sacred grove and keepers of the bananas and all that sort of thing. A very complicated system—evolved of course from generations. And every full moon was a great feast—yes, cannibalism.

"The sacrifice of a young virgin—slaughtered and eaten by the priests with horrible orgies and the heart—torn living—offered to the god. And this time the god was supposed to walk abroad. Every commoner was confined to his house under pain of torture and death; or they could leave the village. Most of them did. A priest, masked and dressed up fantastically, impersonated the god. Yes, they kept to their huts and trembled as they listened to the bellowing of the god passing; for the priests were always on the lookout for the slightest excuse for an orgiastic slaughter."

"Sadistic impulse," murmured Wilkins.

"Yes, yes, that's it of course. Yes, but mixed up—derived from the ancient idea of humanity of the blood-loving Yahveh—the more slaughter there was the better pleased was the god. The primitive which sees the conception of a god as an evil, hungry power, therefore to be appeased with what he desires most—blood—blood—that he is not driven to take them. If he were good, they argue, then being good would not have to be propitiated.

"Well, I as head witch-doctor of the Yawaga, had to participate in—in the feasts The first time I—well I didn't eat human flesh. I pretended to, you know. Afterwards—the taste is rather sweet."

Gibbons ceased. His chair creaked. Mosquitoes hummed and far away a jackal was yelping persistently.

I heard some one giggle. I think it was Wilkins. And the *sniff sniff* of the snuff taking. Then with an abruptness, rather harshly, Gibbons went on:

"THEN at the big meeting I did all my—my silly monkey tricks and—but of course the big witch-doctors didn't turn a hair. They would not have done so had I pulled down the moon on the end of a magic piece of string and cut it into quarters like an orange. They dared not. Each one had to try to imply that he could have done the same thing had the notion taken him. And then—oh well, I was already childish, I suppose. My vanity was hurt. I was vexed because I could not force a grunt of amazement out of them. That rankled—that and——

"Perhaps they were afraid that if they admitted the wonder of the miracle, that none else could do the like, that I should become head priest as I had of the Yawaga. I don't know. Probably. Well that inability to impress rankled—that and the idiotic jealousy of the god Sangha. That idiocy become a mania—curiosity. They had the big meeting to discuss what should be done regarding the whites—the French. Nominally to demand of the god an oracle. I lost my wits altogether. I hadn't enough knowledge nor imagination to imagine, to realize.

"Well, the great performance was—was very childish—from our point of view. But I had lost that, remember. I became too a child and more childish than they. I was as proud and as angry as any child because the other children refused to be impressed by my tricks. The great ceremony merely consisted—all the commoners and slaves had been driven from the village to listen in awe to the bellowing of horns and screams and groans of the greater and the lesser witch-doctors gathered about the entrance to the sacred enclosure.

"There was a great deal of dancing, dancing into a state of hysteria, and incantations by the big witch-doctors, in the midst of which the virgin was—was mutilated and then—and then her heart was torn out and given to a figure which crouched inside the grass hut at the entrance. No, it wasn't the god on whom it was death to look—so they said—but Sakangula, the high priest, who ran with it screaming into the interior.

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"I wasn't even sickened. As you know, at all such native orgies, they work themselves into an extreme state of hysteria. Suggestion is strong and — and by that time I had, as a good witch-doctor, mastered the art of attaining that state at will."

"As any revivalist knows," interrupted Wilkins.

"Probably the reason why I had lost all sense of reason and decency—eaten up with this compelling mania."

"Subconsciousness freed," murmured Wilkins again.

"What's that?" said Gibbons.

"Oh, I only meant that you were doing just as you wanted to do—no restraint of civilized tabus—as you would in a dream."

"Nightmare, what? Possible. But then I shouldn't have wanted to do—no, no, I couldn't, no man would."

"Oh, yes they do," asserted Wilkins and I could feel him twisting his —— mustaches complacently.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake go on," I interrupted, conscious of a desire to tear out that idiot's heart.

"Yes, please go on, Gibbons," added Wilkins.

Gibbons tapped at his infernal snuff-box and proceeded:

"Well, after the sacrifice Sakangula returned—to the blowing of horns and howling and screamed the oracle—merely that the tribe was to wait in peace; that the white men would perish like flies in the smoke of a fire should they attempt to approach the sacred village. Evidently the god was nonplussed and was playing for time."

Wilkins sniggered.

"Oh, for God's sake, shut up!" I exclaimed.

"Well," continued Gibbons, "this was not satisfactory. Immediately arose an uproar. The enemies of Sakangula protested that the god had sinned—that he had done something which was forbidden by tabu and jeopardized the welfare of the tribe; for as you know, their conception of the god is as one responsible for all things and that is why the god is protected by this complicated system of tabu, of sacred cows and that sort of thing; why the god is forbidden to be looked upon, because they confuse every part of the body, hair, spittle, clothes, with the soul, so that if an enemy can obtain possession or even sight in some cases, he can make magic to the injury of the whole, and if to the god then to the tribe. Even the priests themselves implicitly believe that."

"Superstition among the pundits as usual," commented Wilkins.

"Yes, quite—then it was that I sprang my idiotic scheme—I stood up and made a long harangue. Remember that I could speak the dialect fluently. I demanded to see the god—face to face; that I had a stronger medicine than their god; nay, that I had a more powerful god than Sangha; that the spirit who spoke from a box—the gramophone, you know—was a white god who knew the ways and the weaknesses of the whites; that I would challenge the god Sangha, to make such powerful magic as my god; that not only would my god speak words of wisdom, but that he would, at my supplication, repeat whatever was spoken in his mighty ear—the trumpet—thus proving that he was a god indeed. Could Sangha even send a message through a box? Could Sangha repeat what was spoken?

"Immediately there broke out a terrific clamor. The doctors of the Yawaga clamored that their white colleague be put to the test even as he desired, and many of the enemies of Sakangula supported them. Then Sakangula, more cunning than I foresaw at that time, rose and threatened me also, demanding that I make the magic of my white god or suffer the penalty of the blasphemer. I demanded to meet the god, Sangha. But to that they would not agree until I had survived the test. Immediately I produced the phonograph, which I had brought with me—like any cheap conjurer.

"It had arrived from Europe just before I left Wadya, and I had kept it back for this occasion—I put on a record of my own voice which I had already prepared, of course, making a prophecy of the downfall of Sangha and the coming of the white god in a box; that the sign of his coming would be that he would repeat whatever supplication the great high priest Sakangula should say unto him.

"THERE before the sacred enclosure in the hot afternoon sun those half-hundred witch-doctors squatted like carven bronzes. Not a murmur nor a click. But they were impressed by that message and puzzled. Then

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adjusting the recording apparatus I bade Sakangula speak into the ear of the god. He came slowly with great dignity, ironing out the lines of fear which I saw in his face. He spoke a few words and ceased. I bade him go on or my god would be wroth.

"Suddenly he changed his manner and spoke boldly; to the effect that he, Sakangula, had long since prophesied the coming of the great white god, that Sangha was fearful of the wrath to come, was dying. He had taken the chance that I would keep my word. But I didn't see what was in the cunning devil's mind. Then I put on the reproduction sapphire and of course the machine repeated what Sakangula had said —together with my interruption, bidding him to proceed.

"The gust of grunts of amazement and awe rewarded me. But Sakangula was clever. He did not turn a hair. He stood up and in a long harangue demanded the allegiance of his fellows to the new god whose coming he had prophesied, an allegiance to a god who would be more powerful than Sangha, more powerful than the whites, an allegiance which was ratified by a chorus of mighty grunts of assent. Then Sakangula turned upon me; bade me come to meet Sangha face to face.

"But to my amazement full twenty witch-doctors rose as, commanding me to carry my god, Sakangula led me through the grass hut into the enclosure. I was startled. But at the moment I was too excited and elated to realize my mistake. I had never dreamed that I as head witch-doctor of the Yawaga, had not been initiated into the full mysteries of the society which as I afterward found out, was like the Freemasons or any other secret society, degree upon degree to the grand master or high priest.

"Within that first enclosure was another. Here Sakangula spoke some mystic word in a secret language apparently and with only six others—the inner set—led me within the next where was a square grass hut—copied from the Arabs probably. Inside was Sangha, the god."

Gibbons ceased. There was a pause. From Gibbons came that idiotic giggle. Wilkins struck a match to light his cigar. I saw Gibbons' face. He was staring fixedly into the night with a cowed expression, a faint suggestion of which I had seen before.

"Yes?"

"Oh!" His chair complained as he started violently. "What?"

"Well?" demanded Wilkins.

Again came that idiotic giggle. Then after a pause:

"Lord knows what I expected to see. The Lord knows. The Lord knows."

"Did you see the god?" urged Wilkins quietly.

"See? Yes—just an old man as obese as a pig—in that — that uniform there. He was lying on the floor you know, and shrank back as we entered looking like a badly scared ape. I heard his chains rattle—those chains there."

Again he giggled.

"He was chained up, then?" I suggested.

"Chained up? Yes, chained up—just like a dog, he, he, he!"

I shuddered and was about to urge him to continue when Wilkins called sharply:

"Oh, Yalu-u! Bring brandies and soda. Quick!"

I felt queer. That silence waiting for the boy to bring drinks was awful. Gibbons didn't say a word. Wilkins smoked steadily.

"Put down that light!" called Wilkins.

Yalu put down the lantern. That was just like Wilkins' cheek to interfere with my servants, but I couldn't say anything at the time. The boy looked like a ghost in the gloom. I heard Gibbons drink his brandy at a gulp. Then he said quietly—

"Thanks, old man."

After a pause when I was wondering whether Gibbons would finish his story he began again with a rush:

"Of course I had made two terrible miscalculations—simple enough. Just the inability for the white to understand—that is completely—the black mind. A thousand generations of one way of thinking warring against a thousand generations of another way of thinking. Simple. And yet——

"You see immediately we entered the —— hole they seized upon the wretched creature, tore his chains from the wall and his old Portuguese uniform—" he giggled again—"from his back while he whined for mercy."

Again Wilkins sniggered.

"Yes, yes, the god whined——"

"Then as swiftly they set upon me, threw me, stripped me, forced that uniform —" another giggle—"upon me and binding me with fresh chains left me, bearing

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off the ex-god, Sangha. You see they had made me god; muddled the conception of the abstract with the concrete.

"I was perfectly conscious one moment of a fact and the next moment I had forgotten it. I was talking about the inability of the black to comprehend the conception of the abstract. You see I had forgotten that. I had intended that they should except the god *'deus ex machina,'* but——

"Many times I have thought that Sakangula purposely muddled the conception. He was a clever man. No doubt of that. Otherwise he would not have been at the head of his profession. Fine man, six feet; built like a Hercules. Queer face too—somehow reminded me of Nero—yes, an ebony Nero. God, he could talk! Idiotic to call on God when one's been a god." This time the giggle wasn't so pronounced, but the hysteria was there. "Oh, yes, they made me a god. That was the devil."

Wilkins sniggered.

"Oh, that —— abstract! Away from me in the middle of the hut was that cursed phonograph—grinning at me. You know at the moment the —— thing seemed alive. That was the state I was in. I believe—I know I lost my temper—that is I got badly scared. The upset of my ideas—what I had intended to do—and disappointment, yes, it was a form of bitter disappointment. I mean the preposterous things I had imagined. Oh, I was—had been crazy—obviously."

Wilkins and I waited silently. Somehow I could feel what he meant—and could understand what had induced him to take those risks to find—well, what he had found; and in still more an extraordinary way I envied his foolishness: that is if it were foolishness. Or perhaps it was the effect of his story. I expected Wilkins to invite him to have another drink. But he didn't. He just waited. Yet I was sure he was twisting his ridiculous mustaches. You know what I mean.

I don't know what Gibbons was thinking about. Probably about what he had experienced and what it meant to him. Perhaps it was the reproduction of that scene which had caused the same emotions in me; for in that warm silence his sudden chuckle sounded appalling—like an echo of a fiend, vampire. I felt that I could not remain in that clammy darkness. Oh ——, ghosts, all sorts of ridiculous things seemed around me.

I shouted to Yalu for lights, for I could bear it no longer. Wilkins murmured something. I don't know what. Yalu came with a lantern. Wilkins told him gruffly to mix a drink. I dared not look at Gibbons. Yet I did. His eyes were glassy —staring.

Yalu made a drink and gave it to Wilkins, who handed it to Gibbons. He drank it mechanically as if he were unaware of the action. Wilkins had another. I was aware of Yalu's superstitious look at us, as he handed me a glass. I stole a glance at Gibbons. His long hair and great blond beard made him look like—a witch. My God, I don't know—I was relieved when Yalu went away. I know that the sky was faintly tinged with the green of the coming moon. I wished that it would rise —more light.

Wilkins said abruptly, as if he were ordering a slave—

"Go on!"

Gibbons turned to look at him—queerly; and instead of obeying he began to giggle. I had never heard any sound so horribly sardonic, nor had I had such extraordinary emotions in my life. I wanted to—God knows what I wanted to do. But like a tree crashing through a hut came Wilkins' voice commanding—

"Go on, Gibbons."

Vaguely I was bewildered for I had never known that idiot could speak like that. Gibbons obeyed. His eyes remained glassy. I watched him. And he spoke as if he were —a bad record on a gramophone. You know what I mean?

"THEY chained me. I was the god. Sakangula came to me and told he that I must make my god say what he wished. Oh God, the irony—I refused. They starved me." Gibbons voice grew very low. "I—gave in. At length Sakangula spoke himself into the machine. But I knew that it could not last because I had only a score of recording cylinders. But they lasted long enough—too long.

"They fed me on bananas and flesh, and at the feasts the—the sacrificial heart. But I didn't. I didn't." His voice dropped to a whining whisper. "The sacrificial heart—and other sweetmeats—

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I didn't. I wouldn't—until they starved me. Days and nights were nightmares—chained in the hut. Hours, days, weeks, months, years, I don't know—I thought, imagined, wondered, who knows? How many years? Oh God, chained in the shadow of darkness——"

He ceased. I thought that he would never continue. I began to think that he was mad indeed; that he had dreamed these things. Yet—I looked at Wilkins. He held a dead cigar in the left hand and was staring into the night. I looked at Gibbons. He was staring into the night; and I—Wilkins' mustaches seemed like black smudges on an incandescent face. Suddenly his voice boomed remorselessly—

"Go on!"

Again the terrible parody of humanity obeyed.

"The French advanced through the forests. You don't know the plans I had—to aid them, the white men—tribe to tribe—blood calls. How silly. But the cylinders gave out—as I had foreseen that they would. Sakangula—I know he would have helped me—if he could have done so. At my initiation I was taught to be cautious. Spell it or half it—B. Oh—you know. But the French advanced. Either the priest or the god—and you know a god doesn't stand a sporting chance. God, no——"

Gibbons' eyes were glazed. I saw Wilkins glance at him. Again he ordered Gibbons to continue. Gibbons obeyed once more, but in an altered voice which frightened me—like a chant.

"God is responsible for all things. On His shoulders he bears the world which He made, therefore when the world goes wrong must He be punished. I was god. Therefore they beat me—beat me until I too whined as other gods—oh, God!"

Gibbons jerked in his chair, sat up and looked at us—sanely.

"Sakangula was justified," he went on hurriedly as if arguing with himself, "because he believed in his own creed. I mean that he really believed in me as a god, and that if I were sufficiently chastised I would behave. That's it—he did."

The sane stare died out of his eyes as he looked at us. I felt sick—fey as the Scotch say. In that moment I was sure that Gibbons was mad. Yet I wanted—curiosity which had led him to—I balked at the phrase—to be a god. Again he continued—mechanically it seemed:

"They beat me. You have seen. But the French advanced. Then——"

Suddenly he tore his long hair aside revealing a hole where there should have been an ear lobe.

"That was at first—to make me, the god, turn back their enemies; and afterwards—you can guess."

His eyes became glazed again; his body rigid. I rose, frightened. Wilkins said:

"That's nothing. Put him to bed."

We did. He revived when he was between the sheets.

"Thanks, old man," he said and smiled at Wilkins, as if Wilkins were his host.

But, of course, the man was ill. Wilkins went off to his quarters without saying a word. I went to bed.

But I could not sleep. All those vague longings—wishes if you like—experienced when I would sit upon my favorite seat upon the edge of the escarpment watching the place of darkness, as he had called it, came back; but in an intelligible form—just like an emotion put into definite words. Dawn was breaking when I decided; decided that I could not, would not resist any longer. I went to Gibbons' room. He was asleep with one skinny arm over his nest of a face, and he was dreaming, muttering—I went out and called my head man and gave him instructions to—prepare my hunting equipment. I smiled as I passed Wilkins' bungalow. He could have Gibbons all to himself.

To day I have to give a last decision whether Yakombi shall pay Bakombi eight rupees or ten for a new wife. I think that I shall save time by paying the money for him, for—

Away beyond the silvered mountain tops is the pewter of the lakes above the silver mist in the great ravine; yet the violet of the Congo hills seems shrouded in a veil—of black.

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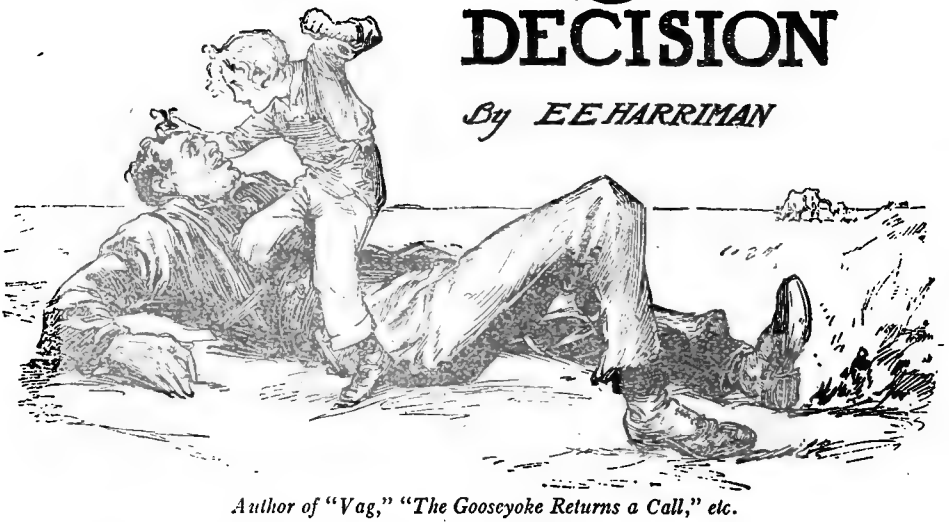
A QUICK DECISION

By E E HARRIMAN



Author of "Vag," "The Gooseyoke Returns a Call," etc.

"SANDY" FERGUSON, the Scotch owner of the Hook and Doughnut brand, always said that Bill Pettigrew had "mair beef than brains," but the owner had to acknowledge that Bill also had grit. Bill was built with the same regard to strength as an arctic ice-breaker. He was bluff about the bows, well braced and solidly sheathed. His legs might have been sections cut from the main-yard and his arms from the jib-boom.

Bill was so powerful that when the other punchers wished to tack some rough joke on him they always played in quartets, unless the running was good. Not that Bill was ugly. Not at all. He was the soul of good nature, but when he started in to repay some gentle bit of pleasantry he was likely to put the other party on the retired list for a week or ten days. Hence the defensive alliance.

There was just one person on the ranch who could do Bill up in a rough-and-tumble fight and that was little Rabbie, old Sandy's only grandson, a curly-headed youngster of six. Let Rabbie get the notion in his curly pow that he wanted to rough it with Bill and you would see burly Bill down in the dirt inside of five minutes, roaring to the rest of the grinning punchers:

"Take him off! He's killin' me! You dog-gone sapheads, don't you see he's got me licked? Take 'im off!"

All the time Rabbie would be throwing in left hooks and right swings, jabs, uppercuts and haymakers, while he screamed and whooped with joy. Presently he would be strutting among the delighted punchers, chesty and proud, asking them if they saw how he put it over on old Bill.

Rabbie owned every puncher on the ranch, body, soul and chaparejos, but Bill was his particular slave. A willing one, withal, for the big puncher had given to the little boy the whole heartful of love that Nature had intended should cover a family of about eight.

Bill had been too bashful to propose to the only girl he had ever wanted badly enough to walk across the road after her, and, after two years of waiting, she had taken a man with more brass to his cheek and even less brains in his head. So Bill devoted himself to Rabbie and tried to forget.

"Kinky" Ballard was the ranch cut-up, convinced beyond redemption that he was a born humorist. He had played several practical jokes on Bill and got away with them. That gave him an idea that he was a foxy devil and immune to punishment.

Bill had been riding about the ranch, just pleasantly employed in collecting data concerning new arrivals among the maternity squad, and counting the wabbly-kneed slew-foots that had come last week. He had orders to make sure that none of the babies had been snagged by "Wandering Willies"

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and "Meandering Mexicans" from the beet-fields. A pleasant little habit these two contingents were addicted to when the mulligan ran low, a habit that Scotch thrift called "cattle rievin'."

In the course of his peregrinations, Bill found a break in the wire and one lathy female outside in a bunch of brush, giving her new-laid son his first hair-dressing. Worse than that, she was decidedly on the peck and had never heard of that style of hairdressing called dehorning. Bill reached for his rope and his open hand hit leather. He looked down where his rope had hung when he mounted and it was gone. His cayuse dodged the cow while Bill soliloquized.

"Dog-gone that —— Kinky!" said Bill, with right smart emphasis. "I oughtta knowed better'n to let him git nigh me. I might 'a' knowed he would be tryin' some dog-gone fool trick. Cuss 'im! Yanked the loop loose an' let my rope flop while he was leaning' so confidential on my saddlehorn up by the gate. Jest wait! If I git my bread-hooks on his meat he'll know a danged sight more'n he does now."

He swayed a little in the saddle, lifted his hand an inch, and old Blizzard, the gray, four-legged half of Bill, struck a lope for the house. It was a mile to the house and more fool cows might take advantage of that break while he was gone, but he had to get that line-backed Jezebel inside, mend the wire, and then carry her baby in. Bill rode like the hair on Blizzard's back, with no more of effort or conscious action. As he rode he "cussed out" Kinky Ballard.

He dropped the reins on Blizzard's neck as they reached the door of the harness-and-saddle room, and hit the ground while the horse was sliding to a stop. He went inside and searched for a new rope under the other stuff that hung on long pins all around the room. He found the rope he wanted and came to the door with it in hand.

"—— —— that —— —— fool puncher," he gently remarked as he looked after Blizzard, loping away in the distance with Kinky Ballard on his back, looking over his shoulder and laughing.

His gaze went down to the dejected, lop-eared mule now standing where he had left Blizzard. He had seen Kinky take old Curse-Me-Jacob that morning, to ride to a fence-mending job.

"That dog-gone puncher thinks he's more kinds of a real humorist than Mark Twain ever hearn tell on, but he's due to git his head put on straight this mawnin' if I ketch 'im. —— his cussed tricks! Whoa, you double-dashed black to dash mewel! You gotta hump yerself right sudden, fer I aim to ketch Kinky an' take Blizzard away from him. Hike, you cross between the devil and a jackrabbit! You kin run to beat —— when you want to, an' by Judas, you're goin' to want to right sudden. Git, you wall-eyed, hard-tailed, roach-necked devil! Git!"

At every word after the first "Hike!" the coil of rope came 'round against the mule's side and every whack seemed to lift him into a greater speed. He was running now at a gait that would make a quarter-horse envious, but still the rope swung and whacked out more speed. Blizzard and his rider had a hundred and fifty yards start on Curse-Me-Jacob, but Kinky did not dare to use quirt or rowel and the mule gained.

The course took Bill and his mule past a little pasture where the new Hereford bull was kept. A glance showed him that the north gate was open and another glance proved the pasture empty. He wondered how that had happened, then recalled that the gate had a poor fastening that sometimes let go of itself unless one took particular pains to get it adjusted just right. The bull was a three-year-old, bought with a bunch of sixty cows only three weeks before, and no one on the ranch knew what his temper was like.

Bill checked Curse-Me-Jacob, named by a puncher who had just heard a Fresno evangelist preach from Numbers XXIII. 7, and stood in the stirrups to look for the bull. The mule thankfully dropped to a mere dandling teeter of a lope, astonished at the change in his rider's urge.

TWO HUNDRED yards away, Bill saw the bull. He was pawing the dirt and advancing one slow step after another, with a long spell of dirt-throwing in between. Bill ran his gaze out across the open ground ahead of the bull and his heart gave a great throb. He saw what the bull was threatening. Little Rabbie, his face to the bull and his head, with its sunny curls, held high, manfully facing death.

The coiled rope came down across the flank of the mule and Bill jumped the beast

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into a swift run once more. He saw that the bull was near charging and he groaned.

"Oh —— that idiot for takin' Blizzard! This —— mule ain't no good fer ropin' an' if he does come up right side to he ain't got any withers to keep the —— saddle from rollin'. The cinch ain't drawed tight anyhow. Cuss all practical jokers from Adam down! If I ever git my breadhooks on Kinky Ballard agin I'll take him apart, so help me, John Rogers!"

He ran the rope out in a good loop and started it slowly revolving. His jaw set till the tense muscles seemed about to burst the skin.

"Ropin' a mad bull from a —— mule, an' usin' a cussed centerfire saddle at that. Aw——! What's the use o' mournin', anyway. Here goes fer somethin' er nawthin'. Come up there, you son of the devil! Hump in clost er I'll bust yer danged neck!"

He was close now, only a few jumps from the port quarter, and the bull heard the sputter of the mule's hoofs. He took it as a signal for action and charged. It was a long throw, too long to be sure, but it was the only chance and Bill took it. The loop went out in a long throw that took all but the last six inches of its length. It settled neatly about those wide horns and Bill threw the hitch of the saddlehorn, while his left hand swung wide to turn the mule.

The flip of the wrist that settled the noose around the bull's horns, the double wrap on the saddlehorn, and the motion of the left hand to turn the mule away from the bull, were made swiftly and Bill put all his weight on the left stirrup to help hold the saddle in place at the expected turn. But old Curse-Me-Jacob refused. With a quick duck of his head to get it below the rope, he tried to make a right turn in place of a left.

As his head swung toward the bull the rope came tight with a twang and the saddle, lightly cinched centerfire as it was, went on over those witherless shoulders to the ground. Old Curse-Me-Jacob buck-jumped clear of the cinch, threw up his head, emitted a rasping bray, and struck for home with his ridiculous tail at a seventy-degree angle and his banana-leaf ears flopping.

The jerk had been hard enough to turn the bull and he now saw Bill picking himself up from the ground. With a short bellow he charged. Bill sidestepped with celerity and the bull went past in a flurry of dust. He pivoted and came back like the bounce of a ball and Bill dodged again. This time he came close to the saddle and caught it up. As the bull charged for the third time, Bill heaved the saddle on his horns and went straight past the bull's left side. The rope had come loose from the saddlehorn and Bill's hand caught it.

The bull had wound the rope about his left ankle in his turning and Bill noted the fact with joy. He brought the rope across the front of his thighs, his right hand took one wrap of it, and then he went across the bull's stern with all his weight and lifting power. The bull was goring the saddle blindly and the jerk of the rope slid his left leg against the right, knocked it from under him and he sat down upon his left hip. A second surge on the rope as the bull tried to rise caused the rope to slip on the ankle and draw taut between horns and leg.

Plunging, kicking, the bull tried to get to his feet, only to be dropped each time as he came half-way up. In his effort he swung his head far to the left once and Bill promptly surged on the rope and took up much of the slack. Now the bull was on his hip with a bowed neck and his horns pointing toward the ground every time he staggered. Another hard surge just as he raised his hips a little and the bull toppled over with one horn driven well into the dirt.

Hogtying is a matter of seconds to an expert puncher, and Bill used the free end of the riata skilfully. He sat down hard on the big neck when he had the bull helpless and opened his arms to the flying figure of little Rabbie. Four horsemen were coming from near the house and Kinky was getting all he could out of Blizzard, even to the extent of forgetting his fear of what the gray would do to him and using both quirt and rowels.

The four reached the scene a few jumps ahead of old Blizzard. Jack Casey reached for the little boy. Bill shook his head and kept Rabbie in the crook of his left arm.

"Jest a minute, Jack. Our kerrige is 'most here now," he said, and the men looked around at Blizzard and his scared rider.

The gray horse came up to the group and slid to a stop. Bill relinquished to Jack his seat on the bull and walked over to the gray with Rabbie in his arms. Kinky slipped from the saddle and began to apologize agonizingly. Bill made no sign to show that he knew that Kinky existed, as

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ıe seated Rabbie and vaulted up behind him. He turned the horse toward the house.

"Aw, Bill! Fer gosh sake, Bill, I never meant no harm," wailed Kinky. "It was nothin' but a joke, Bill, and I never knowed Rabbie was out thisaway."

Calmly Bill lifted the rein and Blizzard struck an easy lope. Behind him the others began the task of getting the bull back to his pen. Kinky Ballard came trudging in the wake of Blizzard, his chaps flapping and his high-heeled boots giving him a teetering gait.

After chuck that night, when Rabbie had been put to bed, Bill gave Kinky a cold stare and jerk of the head that invited him out back of the horse corral. The entire outfit trailed silently after.

"Ye see, Kinky, it's like this," said Bill when they reached the battle-ground. "They ain't no use in talkin' to a danged practical joker, a-tall. Ye jest got to lam him, an' lam him hard, er he'll go right on playin' his fool tricks till he gits some one kilt. It's up to me to take a fall out'n ye, so ye'll remember practical jokes is barred on thisyer ranch till the little 'un is big enough to lick ye hisself. I'm doin' it more in sorrer than in anger, —— ye, so git set, fer when I'm sorrerful I'm dangerous."

"Thar!" said Bill, five minutes later. "As the preacher said over to Los, 'Thus endeth the fust lesson.' Take it to heart and remember it hurt me more'n it did you, like my ol' mammy used to say when she lammed me with a bar'l stave."

CODY AS A BUFFALO-KILLER

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

IN 1869 Buffalo Bill and a man named Rose took a contract to do some grading for the Union Pacific Railroad, during a lull in Indian hostilities. Cody at that time was possessed of a wonderful horse which he had named Brigham, which became renowned as a buffalo-hunting steed of the first water.

Cody was working Brigham on his scraper one afternoon, when one of the graders came running in with the announcement that eleven buffaloes were coming over a distant hill. As fresh meat had been scarce in the grading camp for several days, Cody immediately unhitched Brigham from the scraper, grabbed his famous old needle-gun, and, without either saddle or bridle, started after the buffalo herd.

As he advanced toward the game he discerned five horsemen riding out from the fort, apparently bent on the same errand as himself. They proved to be newly arrived officers who were unknown to Cody. As the latter appeared the captain called out—

"Hello my friend; are you going after those buffaloes?"

"Yes," was the reply. "I saw 'em coming over the hill, and as we needed some meat I thought I'd try to get one."

"Well," laughed the officer, "you'll never kill a buffalo on that old skate. Don't you know that it takes a mighty fast horse to get in close to a buffalo herd?"

"Oh, does it?" queried Cody innocently. "Thank you for the information."

"Yes, indeed; but come along if you care to see the sport. We only want the tongues and you can have the rest."

The officers dashed ahead. Cody noted that the animals were making toward a distant creek, and knowing the habits of the creatures, he headed for the stream.

Dashing down a little ridge, he was soon within a hundred yards of the animals, while the officers were far in the rear. Guiding his horse by the knee only, Cody was soon alongside the nearest animal. Raising the old needle-gun, he killed the buffalo at the first shot. A few jumps and Brigham was alongside the next one.

In this manner Cody killed the entire eleven buffaloes, and the astonishment of the officers knew no bounds when they witnessed the remarkable feat.

"Well, by smoky!" exclaimed the astonished captain. "I never saw the like of that before! Who in thunder are you, anyway?"

"My name is Cody," was the reply.

The officers had heard the name before at the fort. They were a crestfallen bunch, but took their defeat with good humor, and later proved most excellent friends of Buffalo Bill.

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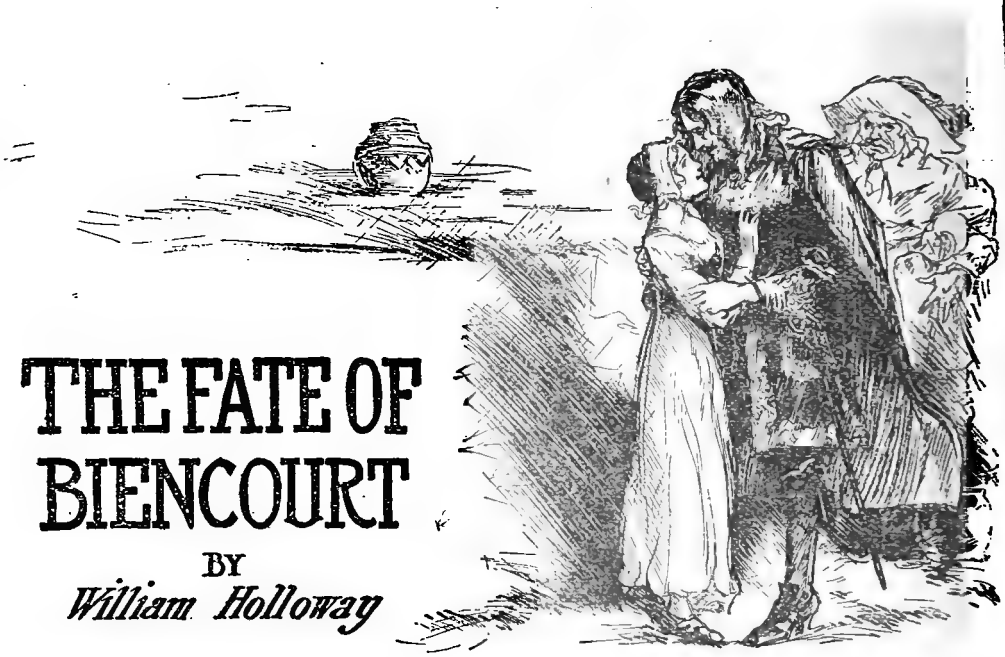

THE FATE OF BIENCOURT

BY

William Holloway

IN AFTER years they told the story of the quarrel differently, for, when it happened, Imbert was drunk and Biencourt dreaming of a certain black-eyed maid-of-honor; neither of which facts would have pleased Annette.

It was no new quarrel. It had been smoldering, like some hidden fire, ever since that Summer day of 1613, nearly two years before, when Captain Samuel Argall and his victorious Virginians had wrenched the fleur-de-lis from its staff and hoisted the banner of James I above the shattered battlements of Port Royal.

At that time some one reminded Argall that Biencourt, the young seigneur of Port Royal, and Imbert, the colony's finest swordsman, who had been absent from the fort on a hunting trip, and had consequently taken no part in its defense, were still hidden in the forest. Would they try to capture them, questioned the Virginians.

The first of a long line of American conquerors smiled inscrutably as he surveyed the shattered fortress, hemmed in on three sides by the forest wastes of Nova Scotia, and on the fourth side by the sea.

"Let the rats nest in the ruins," he said grimly, "until solitude and starvation set them at each other's throats!"

And, wasting no words more, he led his ships into the Bay of Fundy, and thence southward, homeward bound.

Meantime, in the ruins of the abandoned colony of Port Royal, set in from the Bay of Fundy beside what is now Annapolis Basin, his words seemed to be coming true. Each day Imbert, at heart devoted to the young seigneur, grew more impatient and sullen, and Biencourt, anxiously awaiting relief from France, more preoccupied and silent.

Fine ladies in Paris, mindful of Biencourt's latest visit to the court, were even then passing idle hours in fascinating speculation regarding his fate. Reason enough was there for this, for his was a grace and charm which made the ordinary courtier seem matter of fact and clumsy. While still in his early twenties it had fallen to his lot to hobnob with fame, and the spell of far places hung about him. He had aroused great expectations. Men looked to him to carry the lilies of France still deeper into the wilderness. No wonder then that the news of Argall's raid produced a sensation in Paris!

Popular feeling promptly demanded that a relief expedition be sent out at once, that money be granted, that France officially support the colony, hitherto a private speculation. The queen-mother, herself, was expected to open her purse-strings on Biencourt's behalf. But popular feeling, as usual, availed nothing.

The plain truth of the matter was that the little colony of Port Royal, which

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renchmen had hoped would be a counter-oise to the English colony of Virginia, was nken so deeply in debt as to be beyond demption. And so time dragged on, ith Imbert growing, each day, more vage, until this Winter night the spark shed into sudden flame.

Imbert had been drinking for hours from stone jar filled with Holland gin, which he ad by chance discovered in the ruins of the orehouse and the liquor had made him oisterous. As for Biencourt he was smok-g placidly enough, but the vision of the lack-eyed maid-of-honor, which floated rough his brain, made Imbert's noisy rinking-songs jar upon his nerves.

At last, as the singer gave vent to a sud-en discordant howl, France and the maid-f-honor disappeared; Biencourt, with a hock, came back to the Nova Scotian ilds, and saw Imbert's scarred red face oming angrily at him, through the smoke.

"Well, what now?" he said sharply.

"It is always the same," grumbled Im-ert moodily, balancing his sword upon his ast palm, whence, in the course of his peech, it fell clanging to the floor. "Noth-ng to do but smoke and think! No cards! No dice! Not a comrade to sing a catch vith! Nothing but the English robbers' narks to look on!"

Biencourt smiled wearily as one might mile at a thoughtless child. Then confi-lent as ever of the great future which lay efore France in the New World, he began o explain, for the thousandth time, the olony's proud place in the coming years. He had scarcely spoken a dozen words when Imbert rudely interrupted.

"The colony!" he cried, with an oath. 'A colony with two solitary colonists! A colony that has ruined all its owners, and is still thousands of pistoles in debt! That for your colony! And that for its master!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously and commenced roaring a ribald, mocking tavern song, beating time with his hands upon the oaken table till it rang again. Biencourt, wild with rage, sprang to his feet and drew his sword; Imbert stooped unsteadily down and caught his from the floor with a monstrous hand, and the fight began.

It was a weird scene, for the room lay wrapped in shadow, and the scant firelight, falling pallidly on their faces, served in place of candles. Behind each the other saw a vast black background with angry eyes gleaming out from it, while, between, their swords writhed and twisted and caught the light in long, pale crimson flashes.

Biencourt, who was the younger and more active, first touched Imbert on the arm. They paused momentarily, while a cloth was bound about the wound, then began with greater fury than before. This time, Imbert's giant strength slowly but surely beat down Biencourt's opposition. Stanch swordsman as he was his head began to swim before that furious onslaught, his guard failed, and Imbert ran him through the left shoulder.

THE wounded man sank slowly into a chair while Imbert flung his sword, with a whirring crash, into a dark corner. Then he knelt by Biencourt's side, all the drunken bravado vanished from his face.

"I've hurt thee, lad," he said morosely.

"Only a scratch, old pirate, only a scratch," panted Biencourt, with a smile. "But I have a mind to live a while longer and my courage needs no proving." He gazed around the deserted room. "It is a foolish thing for lonely men like us to quarrel. Though, after all," he added, philosophically, "a little blood-letting is no bad thing."

Imbert, his fear gone, rose to his feet. A little blood-letting, of course, mattered nothing in the wilderness, but the momentary dread that he had mortally wounded his leader had partly sobered him. Steadily enough, he went to the fire, threw on it fresh pine-logs, and, with a piece of burning bark, lighted the candles in the two high brass candlesticks that stood on the table. Then he disappeared through the doorway.

Left to himself, Biencourt stanched the flow of blood and made a rough bandage for his wounded shoulder; after which he began smoking again. His pipe had a huge lobster-claw bowl, a fantastically carved wooden stem, resplendent with visages of Indian gods, and from its mouthpiece wampun spread in a white sheen across the blue satin slashings of his doublet. The doublet itself was of black velvet, his long stockings of blue silk, and on his silver shoe-buckles, diamonds shone.

But these few vestiges of past splendor were all that remained to Port Royal, the evil-starred. Outside a bleak wind moaned

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through the roofless storehouses, and, within, the glare from the fresh logs fell on scarred walls and broken furniture, and deep hollows in the floor where Argall's men had lit their bivouac fires.

Even the richly figured oaken mantel, carved in Paris, had suffered with the rest, its quaint devices having been hacked by Virginian axes and marred by Virginian torches until it was a mere mass of shapeless blackness. From the walls above, the founder's motto had been carefully effaced, and, in its stead, some wit had drawn a huge, black cross, in fine derision.

The room, once the state dining-hall of the lords of the seigneurie, was so large and lofty that the two candles, aided by the log-fire, made scant head against the shadows, which lurked beneath the wooden settle skirting the apartment, and in distant corners and danced up and down the wainscoted walls, as the blaze on the hearth flickered low and rose again. At the far end, where the gloom was deepest, loomed the high black chair of state of the lords of Port Royal, like the coffin of some monstrous giant; but now there were neither vassals to judge nor Huguenot strivings to allay, and dust lay on it in a heavy shroud.

Biencourt gave vent to a thick puff of smoke and stared reflectively at the fire. The ruined apartment, with its old memories and its haunting sense of ill-success, was unutterably lonely. The very firelight seemed thronging with the pale, sad faces of those whom Port Royal had already made its victims. De Monts, the Huguenot nobleman, was there and Biencourt's father, and Gilbert Du Thet, the Jesuit lay-brother, and a dozen other cavaliers of France whom the colony had dragged down in its own dark ruin.

He swung sharply about as if to turn away from unpleasant thoughts, and his wounded shoulder, forgotten for the moment, struck with unexpected force against the heavy oak that formed the back of the chair. It was a sudden and disastrous blow; the pain of it smote straight to his heart; a huge, black shadow seemed to swoop down upon him; and Biencourt, his head drooping drunkenly to one side, leaned forward in a faint.

How long the fit of unconsciousness lasted he could never tell. He came slowly back to life again in a space that might have been one minute or that might have been ten; came back not to full vigor, but gradually, by degrees, a slowly vanishing mist before his eyes.

He watched the mist idly as it began to disappear, rolling down the room and escaping ceilingward in shreds and puffs of vapor, except at a single point, near one of the doors, where it seemed to grow denser and more solid. He looked again and could see the faint, vague outlines of a human form. An odd thing! A very odd thing! But, of course, a trick of the eyes! It could not be otherwise.

He turned his gaze away an instant, then brought it back to contemplation of the mist and was surprised to find a woman's face smiling at him from out the wavering shadows—a white woman dressed in furs, young, and of rare beauty!

The very stupendousness of the event prevented Biencourt from giving any outward sign of surprise. His eyes opened a trifle wider, but that was all and presently he found himself regarding the intruder quite calmly and reflectively as though such visitors were an every-day affair at Port Royal.

Biencourt's province of Acadie, as Nova Scotia was then called, was a vast one, embracing as it did modern Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Maine; and all that wide region, as he well knew, did not boast, in this Winter of 1615, of a solitary white woman. Yet here was a beautiful white woman, who had apparently materialized out of vapor! The conclusion was obvious. He was confronted by an apparition.

The thought brought with it sudden apprehension. When the demon wishes to tempt a lonely man he does not appear in his own person but subtly disguised in the gracious form of a woman.

He glanced again at the new-comer. Saints, he thought, did not have such rosy lips or such an ebb and flow of blood upon their cheeks. An evil spirit surely! And persuaded of this, though somewhat against his will—it is by weakening the will of man that the demon imposes his own—Biencourt made the sign of the cross.

Demons, it is well known, can not endure the ancient symbol of the cross. Learned men declare it sets in motion holy vibrations which cause grievous suffering to the agents of evil. With this in mind, Biencourt was prepared to hear a scream of anguish as the evil presence fled into the

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night. Instead the silvery tinkle of girlish laughter rang through the room as the visitor, disengaging herself from the shadows, came forward, crossing herself in turn.

Biencourt heaved a deep sigh. The apparition—for apparition it, of course, was—must evidently be sent by one of the heavenly powers. He looked up at the smiling fur-framed face and his heart gave a sudden exultant bound. For the first time he recognized her, blind that he had been! It was his "lady of the vision," come to him again! Her previous appearance had taken place six months before during a hunting trip that lured him dangerously near the forbidden territory of the Indian graves.

On that occasion he had flung himself upon the turf, to smoke a welcome pipe, and, chancing to look across a near-by chasm, had detected a white woman in Indian costume intently observing him. His eager movement had caused her to vanish noiselessly, leaving him only the haunting memory of a rarely sweet, girlish face. It had been a vision; he had understood that at once; and in lonely musings he had thought of her—his lady of the vision—with a deal of reverence and delight. It was the one part of his Port Royal life to which Imbert could never be admitted. And now she had come to him again.

HE ROSE slowly to his feet and took a step forward, with outstretched hands. Then, at this most inopportune of all times, came the crunching noise of Imbert's feet on the snow outside, and, as if by magic, the vision faded. It was done so quickly that Biencourt could have sworn she had vanished into air. But the dancing firelight is apt to play strange tricks with a man's eyes, and the room, as has been mentioned, was full of heaving, tumultuous shadows. So that it came about that, even while he passed his hand across his eyes to clear his sight, his lady of the vision had left him and he stood face to face with his quarrelsome henchman, Imbert.

Snow lay in white dots on the coal blackness of the shaggy mane of hair that overflowed the swordsman's forehead, and tiny streams of water trickled across the grim scars upon his cheeks. He was quite sober; this Biencourt could see from the way he leaned against the fireplace, rubbing his jack-boots together with the low swish of leather upon leather; and his face was unclouded.

"My sword is over in that dark corner, I suppose," he said with a slow smile, "and I played the fool well enough for once. It was a shame to treat a good sword so. Pierre Euston, himself, gave it to me—as bold a man as ever laid aboard an Englishman in the old days, and so now men say. It was a wild stormy night fifteen years ago, and in the dark we had run upon a Scottish merchantman. We were fighting hand to hand on her red decks, when I saved Pierre from a raw-boned, half-naked Scotchman, who took him unawares."

"'*Mercil*' said Pierre to me, changing swords and giving me his diamond-hilted one. '*Mercil*' he said again to the Scot I had brought down, and then drew his knife across the fellow's throat. There was a wife and a tiny girl with him, too—he was the owner of the vessel—and when lights were brought to clear the decks these two were found clinging to the dead man's body. D'Auvergne got them, I think. He was Pierre's favorite—a dark, sullen dog I never liked."

Biencourt flushed angrily.

"When his Majesty, the King, commissioned me as vice-admiral for all the seas of New France, I swore to hang Pierre Euston to his own yard-arm. And some day, when I have a vessel under my feet again, I'll keep my word."

Next instant he was smiling at the absurd futility of his threat.

"That attack upon the merchantman was brutish work."

"It was," assented Imbert. "But I took no part beyond the fighting. I was mad for war in those days and they had proscribed me in France—so what could I do? Ah, it was rare sport, with a man's life in his hands a dozen times a day, and the swirl of blue waters all about him."

Biencourt laid his pipe upon the table and stared into the fire. His vision had vanished at the noise of a footstep—which proved it merely a fantasy. But this wounded shoulder, however, was no fantasy. The blood had dried upon the arm but the pain was beginning to torment him—a dull beating pain, rising at intervals almost to agony.

"There are better trades than the rover's," he said at length, "and I must

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find one soon, or these crazy walls will sink in upon us. A vessel and some men and I would turn conquistador on my own account and wrest some of the gold-fields from the Spaniards! But there—help will surely come from France by Spring."

Imbert shook his head portentously. Then a softer look came into his fierce black eyes; he drew nearer and laid his uncouth hands gently on the long brown curls that dropped over the younger man's shoulders.

"It will never come, lad—never. The money-lenders have the queen-mother's ear too surely for her ever to aid Port Royal. Years will go by and the ruins will fall around us one by one, until we die forgotten. For what is a beggared nobleman, lost in the wilderness, to the painted women, who rule in Fontainbleau?"

Biencourt frowned, while, to ease the pain in his shoulder, he removed his doublet. It was no scratch, Imbert saw, but a long slash on the white flesh, which had begun to swell around the wound. The quondam pirate shook his head and perked his thick lips, for such cuts were dangerous.

"Can you put something on it?" Biencourt questioned.

Medical stores were non-existent in Port Royal.

Imbert hesitated.

"Yes—no—that is I know—but——"

"Out with it, man!"

Imbert, who in his secret heart had a vast respect for the younger man and his unflagging courage, hesitated still more.

"I know where there is something—an Indian herb," he said slowly, "that will set all right within a week. A minute and I can lay my hand on it; but——"

"Yes!" cried Biencourt impatiently.

"It is a long story," said Imbert.

"Well! What of it? Out with it, I say!"

Imbert cupped his chin in a huge palm, as he considered.

"I never thought to mention it for—for—" he made the plunge—"you see I trampled the laws of Port Royal underfoot," he ended lamely.

Biencourt threw a quizzical glance about the ruined apartment.

"By virtue of our authority as seigneur of Port Royal, and vice-admiral for the king in all the seas of New France—we pardon thee," he said mockingly.

Imbert bowed; then, remembering the duel, a slow smile spread across his sword-scarred face.

"It was the day Memberton, the old Indian chief, died. The priest stood by the bed saying prayers for his soul, while the old chief—he was more than one hundred years old—lay silent. I was there, for the old man was my friend. And, together, the curé and I stood and watched for death to come. Ah, Memberton was a grand man for a savage, a grand man!

"After a while he stirred a trifle and I saw his eyelids quiver. Then he opened them, saw me and beckoned. He wanted to be alone with me, so the curé, being mindful to oblige me on account of some little thing I had done for him shortly before, turned from the bed and went on with his office at the other end of the room. Then I leaned over the bed and put my ear close to the old chief's mouth."

Imbert paused to toss back his shaggy hair, as was his custom when excited.

"I can hear his hoarse whisper even now," he went on. "'I am dying, Embra,' he always called me Embra, 'and in the darkness the white god has fled from me.' Then he asked me to see that he was buried by the rites of his fathers and not by those of the new religion. There was something else he wished to tell me—something he tried very hard to say. But the death-fever came on him again and soon afterward, babbling some nonsense about a strange white man, who lived nearby, and who had sent a message, the old chief died.

"First the curé claimed him, intending to put the body, with great ceremony, into consecrated ground. That was lawful enough, for the curé supposed the old chief had a right to rest there. But he had none—the old fellow was nothing but a heathen. So when night came—you and the rest were absent on an expedition—I stole his body and embalmed it after a fashion I learned among the Spanish Indians, years ago. The curé never suspected I had a hand in it. He thought the Indians had buried the old chief themselves.

"The young chief said Indian prayers until he thought the dead man would be satisfied and then for safe-keeping I hid the body. It is not far away. In fact, it is in the very place of concealment where I first placed it. I intended to move him to the forest but somehow I never did. And sometimes," ended Imbert, "in this cursed

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loneliness that night comes back to me—the stillness of midnight, the flaring candles, the young chief's muttered spells, and the old chief's sightless eyes upturned to the ceiling."

"But the Indian herb?" asked Biencourt, rather puzzled. "Where does that come in?"

"The herb!" repeated Imbert, with sudden confusion. "It is a certain cure for wounds—a balsam of great sureness. I—I hid it in his bosom, so that it might be ready if he needs it when he wakes. Of course, we won't take it all from him."

BIENCOURT laughed aloud, for he well knew Imbert's superstitious trust in half a dozen savage gods from Port Royal to Peru, and Imbert, taking a candle in his hands, went to the dark end of the room. Biencourt followed. There was a small recess behind the tall chair of state, and, stepping within it, the old pirate pressed a spring that opened an iron doorway hidden in the wall, leaving a yawning stone interior to confront them. From out it came a dull smell of pine wood and an impalpable dust that showed whitely in the candle rays.

"A secret passage in the hall of the seigneurie!" cried Biencourt in amazement.

"Aye! Aye!" was Imbert's indifferent answer. "Your father and I contrived it the time you were absent in Paris. It was for—never mind what it was for—it makes a long story. Then your father went away and I kept the secret."

He entered the stone passageway, into which he seemed—Biencourt judged by the clatter of his jack-boots—to penetrate some distance. There was a brief pause and he reappeared with a strange burden which he laid gently in the dusty velvet chair. Then the door closed with a click, and the wall grew smooth again.

They came closer to the chair and looked at the body, now dried up as though it were a mummy and showing no signs of decay, Imbert holding the candle over it and admiring his handiwork. The dead chief lay with folded arms, looking precisely as in life, only the rigid contour of his limbs telling that he was not asleep. Whatever the embalming method that had been used the result was surprisingly effective.

The lank hair framing the dead man's face gave a ghostly depth to the hollows beneath his high cheek bones, and—strangest of all—a long beard swept his breast. It was Memberton, the bearded Indian, France's warmest ally in the West, first trophy of the church in Nova Scotia and now at peace with all theologies.

Imbert reached down and, from beneath the leather jerkin wrapped about the body, produced a birch-bark package. From it in turn he extracted a small quantity of the precious herb. There was magic in its very touch, Biencourt thought, as he felt it being bound soothingly about his arm, while the dead man slumbered peacefully on beside them.

As he was replacing his doublet, his eyes fell on a white edge of parchment protruding from Memberton's clenched right hand.

The position of the arms had been altered by the removal of the bark, and the dead hand, thanks to a certain flexibility, due probably to the embalming process, had loosened in its grasp.

Biencourt stared silently at the edge of parchment. What was it and how had it got there? A charm for the evil spirits perhaps, which Memberton had died holding? Or, maybe, some of Imbert's superstitious mummery? The hand yielded to his efforts; he opened the paper and read aloud.

To the Seigneur of Port Royal—

Greeting. I, Bernadin D'Auvergne of Bordeaux in France, gentleman, being on my death-bed and in grievous sorrow, which only Our Lady's mercy can allay, do hereby appoint thee guardian of the girl Annette, my house and lands and all within.

Biencourt's heart gave a sudden exultant bound. It was no vision after all, but a real flesh and blood woman! He looked at Imbert, strangely unconscious of his happiness. Then, with a little tremor in his voice, he read on.

And by this way shall ye come to it—three scant leagues southward to the river, across it to the Indian graves, and then the third part of a league south along the brook that flows by them. And if——

Here the letter ended as if the death-faintness had overpowered the writer.

"I told you the old chief wanted me to know something before Death clutched him," cried Imbert, with an odd look of triumph. "That was it."

He looked at the young seigneur and each spoke one characteristic word.

"D'Auvergne!" said Imbert.

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"Annette!" said Biencourt.

It was very curious both agreed. It was D'Auvergne, Pierre Euston's favorite, Imbert declared; of course, the girl was dead too by now, he added, or married to one for the savages. Had it not been so they would have heard.

Biencourt thought otherwise; but did not deem it opportune to state the reason for his views. For battle-scarred veterans like Imbert are strangely matter-of-fact and prosaic when it comes to such questions as ethereal visitations. And Imbert might jest at mention of her coming and then—Biencourt looked thoughtfully at his companion—it would be unpleasant to have to clink his dagger's hilt against a comrade's ribs.

From the directions given, D'Auvergne had evidently settled in that part of the country which the Indians had always claimed to be sacred and from which Frenchmen were barred. D'Auvergne, with the plunder of years of piracy at his command had been easily able to bribe the Indians to keep his secret. A man with a price on his head, he had not dared to settle near the coast, lest a chance ship discover his retreat.

That Frenchmen would found a colony in the wilderness, he had, of course, never dreamed. When Port Royal had been founded, a dozen years before, the Indians had stipulated that no white man should enter certain territory. D'Auvergne's hand showed in this. And, now that he was dead, the superstitious Indians would still guard his secret.

Yes, indeed! The girl was likely alive, Biencourt went on, with studied nonchalance. The name, at least, was a pretty one. His shoulder had almost ceased to pain. They would go at once.

A few moments later they had donned their bearskin hunting-coats, and, on snowshoes, clattered noisily through the doorway, leaving Memberton alone to keep his vigil in the chair of state, with the dim candle-light touching his wearied face, and the shadows writhing across the walls.

Outside the moon was high and the wind came in gusty moans. They walked slowly down the deserted square, bounded on all sides by charred ruins and shattered rafters, until they reached the entranceway. No cannon stood upon the dismantled bastions and the stone gateway, carved with the fleur-de-lis of France, lay in a dozen pieces at their feet.

The snow was hard and progress consequently rapid. They came to open spaces where duels had once been fought between well-known Parisian gallants, passed places famous in camp-fire legends, for strange adventures, and lonely spots where men had died in snow-storms.

Then came the place of Indian sepulture, a hollow by a waterfall, with niches cut in the crumbling rocks in place of graves—a weird place, where spirits of the red men were said to hover, and no Frenchman's life was safe. Following this they held their way until they reached a tiny plateau, hidden from sight by higher hills, and saw the massive log walls of the house they sought.

EVEN in the darkness they could understand the completeness of D'Auvergne's seclusion. The Indians had always stipulated that no Frenchman be allowed within half a league of the place of graves, while on the farther side D'Auvergne had been guarded by inaccessible forests.

"A clever man, this pirate friend of yours," said Biencourt, as they descended the hillside.

He was not thinking of D'Auvergne, however, but of a girl in furs.

Imbert caught him by the hand.

"Look!" he whispered hoarsely. "The red villains!"

In the moonlight they could see dark figures running over the snow. Then the door of the house was flung wide open and upon the threshold appeared a woman's form blackly outlined against a light within. What she said it was impossible to hear, but suddenly they saw a spurt of flame, and knew that she had opened fire upon her assailants. Then the dark figures closed in on the house.

In such an emergency the clumsy arquebuses which the white men carried, were worse than useless. Imbert flung his far before him with a shout that stirred the forest far and wide, and caused the savages to draw back, confused and undecided. In another instant the two were among them.

They were not Mic-Macs of Memberton's old tribe, as their head-dress showed, but part of a marauding band from the Atlantic shores of Nova Scotia, intent upon

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plunder. Brave men they doubtless were, experts in the swinging of a tomahawk or in the circular sweep of a scalping knife. But white men they had never before encountered—least of all, white men, who leaped to battle with pieces of steel in their hands that flamed hither and thither like flashes of Summer lightning—men with wrists that carried death in every stroke.

Scant wonder was it that after five had fallen on the reddening snow, the rest fled helter-skelter into the forest, using their snow-shoes in the underbrush as no white man ever can. Then, wiping their swords, both Imbert and Biencourt turned curiously toward the house, whose mistress they had chanced to aid.

Lights were in the windows from rudely made tallow candles, lights that to Biencourt's imagination were stretching out beckoning hands. Imbert, too, uncouth though he was, seemed to yield to their subtle spell, for, on a sudden impulse, he began to run, and by the time Biencourt reached the door, he saw him bowing formally to a tall, lithesome girl, who stood upon the threshold.

Biencourt gazed at her with a certain awe. She was real, then, was his first thought! His lady of the vision. And staring at her, he slowly saw a widespread flush crimson her cheek; after which he swept the snow with his fur-cap in salute.

"The third vision is the real one," he said softly.

The girl smiled demurely. Then she bethought herself, and made her guests a courtesy, stately as either had before beheld, keeping her sea-green kirtle from the floor with marvelously dimpled hands.

Since Bernadin D'Auvergne's death, she told them she had lived alone with her Indian servants, cultivating, as best she could, the large fields he had laid out during his lifetime. But the squaws were often lazy in their work, in spite of all her efforts. The house was rather large, too.

Biencourt had noticed this himself, for Imbert, with ready self-possession, had made his way to the kitchen, whence his voice, coming through the halls, sounded curiously far away. He was making jokes in Indian to the squaws cooking moose-meat there, and every now and again their laughter rang hoarsely out. Undoubtedly a large house!

Biencourt had removed his snow-shoes and bearskin coat, and he and Annette sat facing each other opposite a high fireplace in the principal room. There was a large, round table in the middle of the floor, and a great abundance of home-made candles about the walls on tiny shelves. Soft rugs served for carpets, and strange foreign relics stood about, for which D'Auvergne had no doubt paid in blood; and, confronting them on the mantel, was some of Annette's own handiwork—two Indian warriors done in colored beads.

It was all very pleasant, Biencourt thought, after the lonely room he had left. The walls were not scarred, like those at Port Royal; the many lights rained a yellow glamor through the air; and to crown all, Annette sat near him, her slender hands clasped on her lap, a soft flush coming and going on her cheeks.

She had told him of the dreadful night Pierre Euston, the pirate, had boarded their vessel, and how her father had been killed, and how D'Auvergne, a good man at heart, had saved the lives of her mother and herself by claiming them as his share of the booty, and then of the life the three had lived in the wilderness. D'Auvergne, it turned out, had been anxious to abandon the corsair's life and do penance for his sins in the solitude of the forest.

A morose, taciturn man, his later life had been one long expiation, so much so that Annette's mother, whom D'Auvergne held in the highest honor, was firmly convinced of the man's redemption. Then, as years drew on, Annette's mother had died. After which D'Auvergne, worn out by austerities, had betaken himself anew to his prayers, until at last, weakened from fasting, he, too, had died and left her alone with his ill-gotten treasure, its silks, its gold pieces, and its blood.

"What I can not understand," said Biencourt, when she had ended, "is how you entered Port Royal—and why."

"There is a road, by drifts, from the sea across the bastion," was the hasty reply.

"And why did you come?" he went on, with a delicious tremor.

"You see," explained the vision, "I thought that if my guardian failed to come to me, I must go to him, and when I came," she smiled, "he thought I needed exorcism." She hesitated an instant. "I saw the duel, too," she added quietly.

A little silence fell between them.

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Annette was looking steadily into the flames, feeling her cheeks flush hotter beneath Biencourt's gaze, and growing angry at their very redness. During her quick dash homeward she had been telling herself that she had been very foolish, and here she was acting more foolish still. A curious little pulse was throbbing in her temples. She was angry with herself and yet glad to be seated where she was. The pulse throbbing in her temples was after all, odd as it may seem, strangely soothing.

"Annette," said Biencourt, rising and approaching her chair.

Annette rose, too, and counted the lace-points on the ruffles of his doublet, which seemed the only thing to do. He looked very gallant this young French explorer; for months the Indians had been telling of his stubborn courage in the lonely fort; and for months she had been thinking of their chance meeting on the hillside. He was fair, too, which was a great thing.

"Annette," said Biencourt again, more slowly than before.

A FEW minutes later, when Imbert came in from the kitchen, they were standing hand in hand before the fire.

"When Spring comes, Imbert, you shall go to France to buy us cattle," said Biencourt in a matter-of-fact tone—the only tone Imbert could be made to understand. "Mademoiselle tells me that her Indians can guide you across the country to a port where a French trader comes each Summer. A dozen cattle will do and a few horses, but no colonists, mind, to quarrel and balk our plans. The savages work well enough for what we need. They——"

"Wait! Wait!" cried Imbert, tossing his shaggy mane amazedly about. "I to go alone and have them seek to learn, perchance, where you have gone! The queen-mother, herself, may ask—that spawn of the Medici! What shall I say has become of you?"

Biencourt laughed. Then he turned his half-lit blue eyes on Annette, and gently laid his hand on her shoulder. The girl drew closer.

"This," said he.

THE SHOTS THAT FAILED

BY HUGH THOMASON

WHILE an inpsector in the Government service several years ago, my duties called me to a small town in the Cumberland Mountains, on the Cincinnati Southern Railroad, called Rugby Road Station. I put up at the house of a citizen, and sallied forth in search of a saddle-horse. I had been told by mine host that Mr. Schoemaker, who kept the general store, had a horse that I could get. I made arrangements to get the horse early next morning, and by sunrise on that day was well on my way, riding through the mountain passes in my district.

After a hard day's work I saw the sun disappear behind the western hills, while I was still a good five miles from Rugby. I was riding slowly along the trail, on the top of a "hogback," in the gathering gloom of the twilight, when all at once; *bang*, went the report of a rifle, and a Winchester .45-60 bullet, hitting a black-jack sapling about one inch above the line of my head, sprayed me with splinters and bits of lead. At near the same time a tall grizzled mountaineer rushed out from the bushes exclaiming—

"Excuse me stranger; excuse me; I thought you was Bud Schoemaker."

"My God, man!" I exclaimed. "You should be more careful."

"Yes," he said, "I should. It certainly was a dog-gone sorry shot. But you see, stranger, I am gittin' old and cain't see like I uster could, specially when it's gitten dark. Please excuse me. I'm shorely glad you ain't Bud."

I told him that I was somewhat gleeful over that fact also, seeing that he felt so peevish toward Bud. Bud was the nephew of the owner of my horse.

We shook hands and parted good friends. In the course of three or four days I went down to hire the horse again.

"I reckon you cain't use him no more," said the old man. "Some scamp shot at Bud last night, and hit my hoss in the neck."

Another miss recorded against my friend. I was really sorry as I felt certain that the old fellow would grieve for a long time over it.

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THE WATERS UNDER THE EARTH

A Complete Novelette

By S B H Hurst

Author of "On the Far Edge," "Flotsam," etc.

THE first bottle was picked up in the crossways tides of Amherst; the next by a ship's boy, "fishing" for albatross in a calm off Cape Horn, and a drunken negro found one on the beach at Port Royal. But the interest of the world was not aroused until the little daughter of a Standard Oil employee, playing in the mud under a wharf at Bayonne, New Jersey, managed to cut her hand with another of these strange message-carriers. For this finding earned a paragraph in a great New York daily—which afterward found a complacent source of self-advertisement in the fact of its having been "the first to bring the matter to the attention of the world."

But this passing notice was as nothing compared to the result of Lady Maxwell's stubbing of her toe on a half-buried bottle on the Brighton sands. Unusually big headlines in all the English papers were the direct consequences of this episode, exciting the reading public probably more than anything in the memory of print.

For every bottle had contained the following curious message:

> Help! I don't know where I am.
> GEORGE BARNES.

Who was George Barnes? Where was he? Why did he not know the whereabouts of himself? Why did he want help? Such were a few of the many questions screamed at a newspaper-buying public; all of which brought Grace Curtiss into the public eye, as being the one vitally interested human being among the few who knew anything at all about George Barnes.

It was early Spring of the year 1905, and Grace Curtiss lived with her father in a rented house, number eleven Bayswater Mansions, London W., one of those anything but pretentious abodes with a high-sounding name, peculiar to London. Her father, a retired army officer, was a widower, dependent entirely upon his small pension. They lived very quietly, keeping one female servant. Grace was the only child, and her mother had died at her birth. And the girl was now in her twenty-second year, of a fair, healthy, robust, English type.

Shortly after the birth of Grace, Major Curtiss had greatly added to his responsibility by taking under his care the destitute child of a dead brother officer; and this boy had grown to manhood as a loved son and brother—a relationship recently changed, to the joy of all concerned, to that of accepted husband to be. This young man was George Barnes. He was twenty-four years of age, well built and of pleasing

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appearance, and he earned a fair salary in one of the numerous offices of the Government—a position Major Curtiss had with some effort obtained for him.

The wedding was to take place on the second of June.

About the middle of March or the beginning of April, Grace began to notice a distinct change in her sweetheart—not in so far as she herself was concerned, but in his general behavior. From an average phlegmatic young Englishman of public-school training he had changed into a nervous, absent-minded thinker; apt to forget a conversation in the middle of it, given to sudden starts, and the habit of looking 'round behind him, as if he were afraid he was being watched.

Such was the way it seemed to Grace.

His appetite fell off to nothing, which was perhaps the worst sign of all, and he stayed later every night at the office than either he had been accustomed to doing, or his duties were supposed to require. Indeed, when Grace questioned him, he made overwork the sole reason for his condition—this when he could no longer deny it—and followed the admission by returning to the office every evening after dinner, and remaining there until after midnight. And then there came the night he did not come home at all—the little servant reporting to Grace that his bed had not been slept in. This upset the girl dreadfully. She felt that George was being imposed upon, and, without counting the consequences, she went to the office, obtained an interview with the head of the department in which George worked, and, as she expressed it, gave him a piece of her mind.

It was not fair or right that so much work should be piled on George's back, just because he was a willing worker, and the others were either lazy or incompetent.

The head of the department was astonished, but not angry. A visit from a girl as beautiful as Grace was too charming to be annoying, whatever the reason for the visit. But when he explained that if George were working late it was entirely without his knowledge, and that so far as he knew there was no reason for any one working late, she was more upset than before. Was it possible that George was deceiving her? Horrible thought—was there another woman? She left the office in a miserable frame of mind, in spite of the promise of the chief clerk to keep George from overworking himself.

And the chief himself shared her views, though with less reluctance, since he had once been a young man himself. The other woman, he thought, must either be simply wonderful, or else Barnes was a fool, with no taste. For Grace was the prettiest woman he had seen in a long while.

He knew, of course, that there was hardly enough work to keep the men employed, much less keep one of them working overtime; but after a little thought, he decided that a broad hint was all George Barnes needed.

So he sent for him.

"Barnes," he said when the young man arrived, "it's none of my business, I suppose, and I was once a —— young fool myself; but hereafter when some special attraction prevents you from going home to sleep don't lay the blame on the office, for that reacts on me. A very charming young lady came to tell me just now that I was an old brute for keeping you so hard at it. I told her that I wasn't doing anything of the sort, so she probably formed her own conclusions, which are no doubt much the same as mine."

He peered at Barnes steadily through his heavy glasses.

"You show it, too, young man. A more washed-out face I never saw. Go home, and rest for the balance of the day, and tell the young lady the truth—it's always the best way—perhaps she'll forgive you."

So George went home, but he persisted in making the office his excuse for not coming home. He did, however, explain that the work he was doing was not forced upon him—that he was making an independent investigation into certain matters. He knew she trusted him, because there was no one but herself in his life. And the work he was doing would, he believed, redound to their mutual advantage.

Of course she trusted him, but she did not stop worrying, and George did not stop staying late at the office. And such is a brief résumé of affairs up to the twenty-seventh of May, less than a week before the day set for the wedding.

ON THE afternoon of that day Grace was in her room, sewing at a part of her modest trousseau, when she was called to the telephone by her sweetheart. He appeared to be greatly excited, talking rapidly, repeating:

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"I have it. I have found it. It's 'the waters under the earth,' yes, 'the waters under the earth.'"

Then, as she told the police later, he appeared to suddenly let the receiver fall, as if he had stepped away from the 'phone, and forgotten to hang up or say good-by. Puzzled, and somewhat alarmed, she tried to call him, but Central explained that the line was busy or out of order. Any one acquainted with the London telephone system of that period will know that this was not unusual; so the girl hung up, and went back to her sewing. She was somewhat upset, but not exactly alarmed; and when she remembered George's words she tried to believe he had been joking—for he sometimes tried to be witty, in a heavy, abstruse sort of way.

That evening George did not come home for dinner, and, as he had particularly promised to, Grace was much alarmed, and immediately began to make inquiries. But not a trace of him could be found. He had disappeared without a word to any one, so the other clerks said, leaving his hat and coat in the office. Even his wallet, containing nearly fifteen pounds, was found in his inner coat pocket. In the end it became evident that no one had seen anything of him since he went outside to the telephone-booth in the hall—apparently when he called Grace.

Then the storm broke on the girl's defenseless head—blowing from the direction of her father. Why hadn't she told him about the "suspicious actions" of her intended husband? What the devil did she mean by doing her own spying, and keeping things to herself? Just like a woman. And a man of his experience in the house, too. He really didn't know what the world was coming to. A detective in the house, asking questions. And of course it all had to happen when his liver was giving him fits.

The detective was probably one of the worst at Scotland Yard. A self-satisfied, ignorant ass. He wanted to know why Grace hadn't called on the police long before, thereby making his task so much the easier. But Grace, what with the loss of her sweetheart and her father's tyranny, now found her back to the wall, and fought back. She informed the detective that if every woman who was worried about her man's working too hard were to send for the police, said police would have to earn their wages, which would be cruel.

The detective thereupon made a few notes, and went to work to loaf on the job. But, after all, this jangling, this mouthy battle served the purpose of an anodyne. The first, usually prostrating, days of grief were bridged by angry interviews—and there was always the distant hope that a letter from George would come out of a cloudy sky, making all things clear.

But Major Curtiss thought otherwise. He positively forbade Grace to mention the name of the missing man in his presence, claiming he had eloped with another woman. And when the girl asked him why, if such was the case, he had left the substantial sum of fifteen pounds behind, he only snarled. A few weeks later, the detective was sent on another case, and the Yard, with a most unusual lack of diligence, forgot to appoint another. So the world forgot the affair, leaving Grace to her conflicting theories, and a determination never to marry unless George came back to be her husband.

And then, nearly a year after his disappearance, the first bottle containing his message was picked up, and, later on, the growing excitement forced Grace to come forward with the admission that she had no doubt that the messages were intended for her, while Barnes had evidently very thoughtfully left her name to be supplied by herself, in the event of circumstances having arisen which would have made it embarrassing if he had mentioned it.

Then the papers began to ask why he had disappeared, and one went so far as to suggest that he had been caught stealing military or naval secrets, and boldly asked the War Department to either confirm or deny this theory. The secretary replied with what seemed rather unnecessary heat, that any one but a newspaper would know that if a Government clerk were caught stealing plans, he would be tried, sentenced and imprisoned. In time of war the sentence would be death.

Somewhat cryptic, but final. And then a thousand correspondents ran to the question: "Were the messages genuine—were they from Barnes?" And two papers ran extras—so had the affair taxed the public mind—bearing the signed statement of Grace Curtiss that every note found in the bottles had been in the handwriting of

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George Barnes, which she knew well. And Major Curtiss was reluctantly compelled to endorse this.

But Scotland Yard remained strangely indifferent. As the *Daily Record* commented:

"Why does the Yard ask for more evidence before making a determined effort to find Barnes? Is it not the business of Scotland Yard to find evidence?"

And another opposition sheet remarked—

"It is strange, in these days, to know that a fellow human being is crying for aid, without any organized effort being made to help him."

And then twelve bottles were found in a month, all containing the familiar message, without the slightest variation, and the newspapers opened their columns for subscriptions to be used in finding George Barnes. But the subscriptions were never used for that purpose. In fact, Grace had barely receipted for the first check sent her, and was hesitating among the numerous private-detective agencies that had begged her to employ them—some even offering guarantees of success, provided their expenses were assured—when the blow fell.

It came from several newspapers simultaneously, but Grace never discovered where it originated, and the editors refused to discuss the matter, claiming that they printed it as news clipped from another paper; and that they believed it to be true.

And the story was that a sailor admitted being the father of the bottles. He had written the messages for a joke, after his ship had sailed from various ports—after a friend in London had told him about the mysterious disappearance of the Government clerk, Barnes—and he had seen no harm in it until he learned the people were subscribing their money as a consequence. Then he had confessed.

Whoever originated this story did it very cleverly, for the touch on the public pocketbook greatly offended. Every subscriber felt he had been robbed, and this feeling so clouded all critical sense that no one questioned the yarn about the repentant sailor. One or two did ask for his name but these saw the force of the excuse that he wished to preserve his anonymity.

The "George Barnes fake" was dismissed with some editorial sermons, and references to Barnum, and Grace was asked to return the money sent to her, which she did with a few scornful words anent the threatened prosecution—the thing having wandered so far from the path of logic that she was accused of being the sailor's accomplice, and of having disagreed with him about the division of the spoil. And when the "confession" of the mysterious sailor did not halt the finding of the bottles—which continued to be picked up at intervals during almost the entire time covered by this record—one or two papers sought refuge in ambiguous explanations, while the others disregarded the unanswerable contradiction entirely.

BUT poor Grace underwent another tirade from her father, who practically accused her of sending the messages herself; finishing his furious speech by falling in a fit on the hearth-rug, from which he never recovered consciousness.

The verdict was "natural causes, due to heart failure," and some sympathy was expressed for "the late gallant officer," while Grace, the only witness, was made the target for many eyes that seemed to consider her responsible. For the jury was made up of church-goers of unpleasing personalities, who regarded great beauty as a snare of the devil because it had never smiled upon their narrow faces. But she ran the gantlet of their stares with head held high, and contempt curling her lovely lips, and the jury went home to tell its wife, who supposed Grace would go on the stage, but secretly hoped, after hearing the description of her, that she had a worse fate in store.

And, truly, things looked blank. She had no income, and had never earned a penny in her life; and after selling their bits of furniture and paying off the tearful servant—who wanted to stay and work for nothing because of her love for her mistress—Grace had less than ten pounds in the whole world. She was not vain, but beauty such as hers and no money was a dangerous combination in a city like London.

And why didn't George say more in his messages. She had thought until she was actually sick, and many pounds of her lovely roundness had been eaten away by worry, although she was far too brave a girl to dwell upon her troubles. She must face it, she would face it. To help George was beyond her power. She didn't know even how to go about helping him. Some day she would find him—she felt sure of that.

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How, she did not know—perhaps he would come back to her. But it was obviously her duty to buck up, and not let the thing get on her mind any more than it had done.

The rent was up next day—she must move out. She beckoned a boy and bought an evening paper. She would try to find a quiet boarding-house, at about twenty-five shillings a week. She had heard that such places were anything but comfortable, but she had no choice. If her poor father had not been as proud as he was poor, he would have let her learn some way of making a living. But, then, of course, she was to have married George. She let the paper lie unheeded on her knee, and stared unseeing into the gathering shadows.

But this would never do. She wanted a cup of tea—that was what was the matter with her. So she threw aside the unopened paper, and filled the kettle.

The tea fulfilled its mission, and refreshed her. Then she picked up the paper, and saw a slight rift in the clouds. Of course it might be only the prelude to another disappointment, but it offered about the only work she could do. In the paper was an advertisement for "a young lady of good family, to act as companion to elderly lady in feeble health. Apply, so and so, Chelsea."

Grace was an energetic girl, and, despite the lateness of the hour, she made haste to answer the advertisement in person. She reached the address given, and to her surprise—we have said she was not vain—the position was at once given to her. The pay was small, but the duties were light, and everything except clothes was found. She had been rather afraid that her name would bring questions, but Curtiss was common enough, and the lady who greeted her so kindly apparently never thought of connecting her with the Grace Curtiss the papers had made notorious. Grace was very thankful that she had never yielded to the request for a photograph for publication, and that her father, also, had been so opposed to such a thing.

So it seemed that she had settled down to end her life as so many women of her class do, in a narrow lane of life, with a never-forgotten heartbreak at a corner left behind; to grow old placidly, cherishing a memory, to die and go to fill the churchyard, and—never know the why of all the pain, of all the yearning, of all the disappointment, of all the mother-hunger.

And, thinking thus, Grace grew paler, more wan and nervous, until her employer insisted that her doctor should prescribe for her when he made his hebdomadal visit. The doctor, finding no organic trouble, told her to try to occupy her mind with something other than that which she was obviously worrying about—a very popular prescription with the medical fraternity, but the most dufficult of all for the patient to take.

"But," queried the interested Mrs. Gillis, her employer, "what can cause so young a woman as you to be nervous? Now, in my case——"

She stopped hurriedly, as she always did when the cause of her breakdown came uppermost. Like Grace, she had a secret trouble, which was apparently connected in some way with her husband, although a more devoted elderly husband could not have been imagined. Grace had developed the idea that he was an escaped convict, living on the interest of his invested stealings, and making a mere pretense of writing a book on folk-lore—for which purpose he kept a carefully locked study, and made periodical trips into the country districts to collect material.

But, whatever he was, the girl had no complaint to make of their treatment of her, which could not have been more kind. And now, this solicitude about her health. It was embarrassing, to say the least; for much as the girl wanted to confide in some one—to have a good cry in some comforting woman's arms—discretion ordered silence. Men have disappeared many times before, but the women they left behind them have generally had some one to comfort them; and poor Grace found that keeping her affairs to herself, and doing entirely without sympathy, was the hardest part of it all.

And she could only make an evasive reply to the well-meant question of the old woman—murmuring something about "an unhappy love affair."

Yet, much as Grace disliked prying, the cause of her employer's nervousness offered the very mental relaxation the doctor had ordered. What was the mystery about the kindly Mr. Gillis? And why did he always keep the study door locked, allowing no one to enter the room but his wife, on those rare occasions when she felt sufficiently strong to dust and tidy up. And about the house, too, there was something unusual, although

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for a time the girl could not interpret in terms of thought what her eyes were always aware of.

It was rather a large house, a queer, rambling structure, built in the reign of Queen Anne, near the water, when that water was a fashionable resort—a condition difficult to imagine; and at length it dawned upon the girl that it occupied more space outside than it did inside, which was her ambiguous way of deciding that there was some space unaccounted for by the rooms, unless the mysterious study of Mr. Gillis was much larger than any study needed to be. She became quite interested, and with much fear and trembling bought a skeleton key—determined to explore the study when Gillis next went away. But her conscience pricked her.

What business was it of hers to pry into other peoples' affairs, especially when they had been so kind to her? It was just curiosity, but, after all, Mr. Gillis had a distinctly criminal type of face. Without questioning her suddenly acquired knowledge of physiognomy, she did ask herself if the Gillis face was any excuse for the violation of the Gillis study by one who had eaten his bread and salt. But there might be a secret chamber that Gillis was not aware of —some relic of history.

She rather thrilled at this notion. And, besides, she would disturb nothing, and, therefore, Gillis would never know she had been in the room. So she discussed the matter with herself, perfectly well aware that she would enter that study at the first opportunity. Lying half-asleep in bed, you have perhaps dreamed you heard the window blind fly up with a bang. You opened your eyes to watch and hear it do so. It's a debatable subject, but something more than mere curiosity impelled Grace Curtiss to become burglar for once. There is a reason for the obscurity of this remark.

And the next time Gillis went away from home, Grace waited until her mistress was taking her afternoon nap, and went quietly up-stairs to the study. As usual the door was locked, but with fear and trembling, and memories of Bluebeard, she tried her skeleton key. Rather to her surprise, the door opened easily; so she switched on the light—for strange to say the room was without windows—and closed the door behind her.

It was an extremely large room, and the air was stuffy, but the simple furnishings offered nothing of interest. At the end of the room farthest from the door a curtain hung as a screen, and feeling sure that behind it was the answer to her question, Grace switched on another light and nervously crossed the floor. She was not mistaken. Pulling the curtain to one side, she saw a close-fitting door, with a bar-handle to the right, and a small grating covered by a slide on a level with her eyes.

SHE was more than surprised—she was very much frightened, for inexperienced though she was she knew she had found the door of a padded cell. And what was Gillis doing with a padded cell in his study? What had it to do with folk-lore? There was something uncanny, something horrible about her discovery. Was Gillis a murderer? And did he keep the bodies of his victims in the cell? No wonder Mrs. Gillis was a nervous wreck.

Grace shuddered, terrified, every instinct urging her to beat a retreat. She had solved her problem, and accounted for the missing part of the house, but she wished she hadn't. It might have been a secret chamber before it had been converted into a padded cell, such as they have in lunatic asylums. She would go back. But why not try to find out more? Wasn't a padded cell more mysterious than a secret chamber? Yes, she would be brave, and look inside. Gillis was away, and would never know. But she hesitated. Suppose there was somebody in the place?

Suppose—which was more terrible—there was a dead person in it. At this thought she snatched her hand away from the door handle. Then she summoned all her resolution, and refused to run away—a dead person couldn't hurt her, and a living one would need help.

The word "help" decided her. It was the word George had used so often in his bottle messages; and while by no chance could George be in the cell, the old impulse to assist him gave her strength. With a sudden jerk, she pulled aside the shutter that covered the grating, but it was several minutes before she could find courage to peer fearfully through it, and while she waited she was in deadly apprehension of eyes—glittering, mad human eyes, that might suddenly stare horribly at her through the grat-

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ing. And only the knowledge that the cell could not be opened from the inside gave her courage to remain.

But at last she managed to look through the grating—keeping her face as far from it as possible, however—and she saw nothing, because the inside of the cell was in absolute darkness.

"Is there any one in there?" she whispered hoarsely.

There was no answer, so she would have to open the door, unless she gave up and went back to safety, which seemed to be the wisest thing to do. After all, it was no business of hers. The cell might have been used years before Gillis bought the house. It might have been a private asylum, or something, and Gillis might have allowed the cell to remain as a sort of curiosity. But why this pressing sense of danger? Oh, yes—that was due to her being in the study—it was like being a burglar.

But what was Mrs. Gillis afraid of? There must be something. And Grace felt sure that something had to do with a padded cell. If not, why was it concealed, and why was the study door always kept locked?

The girl's brain began to whirl in the way it did when the problem of George attacked her, and almost without knowing what she did she opened the cell door—turning away with a suppressed shriek as she realized what she had done, and running to the study table, behind which she took refuge from her imaginary danger.

But nothing happened. The cell door remained partly open, just as she had left it, and no ghost or human being with fiery eyes stalked out menacingly. With a hysterical little laugh, she called herself a foolish, frightened girl, resolutely picked up a box of matches from the study table and walked back to the cell door, throwing it open to its full extent.

She struck a match—not without shutting her eyes fearfully, however—and looked about hurriedly, finding an electric switch, which she turned. The light showed nothing but the padded walls and floor—the cell was quite empty.

Much relieved, Grace walked into the place, and began to examine the walls. Any one confined there might have scratched a message, so she began to search carefully. And she had raised another problem for herself. Should she tell any one about her discovery of the cell—the police? But it was no crime to have a padded cell in one's house. It was likely enough only a relic of a time when the house was a private asylum. Private asylums were common—too much so. There was no evidence of any crime, and yet Grace felt sure that there was something wrong, and that it was her duty to give information much as she disliked the idea of having anything more to do with detectives.

She had been carefully examining the walls while thinking, circling the place and coming back to the inner side of the small grating. Suddenly she stiffened. On the lower part of the wooden frame in which the bars of the grating were fixed was a faint scratching—something written with the point of a nail or perhaps the prong of a fork. With an overwhelmingly prophetic sense of what she was about to find, she leaned closer. Her ears rang, and black specks floated before her eyes. With a furious effort she cleared her senses and looked again. She was not mistaken. There were two words scratched on the wood. And the words were—

GEORGE BARNES

That was all. No message, search as she might. Just his name, barely legible, but his name without doubt. And when had he done it, where was he now, who had put him in the cell? These and a thousand other questions surged through her mind. And, again, as in the case of the bottles, why hadn't he been more explicit—why hadn't he written more, or given some clue?

But one thing was clear enough: Gillis must know all about it, and—was it possible their kindness to her was some sort of conscience-stricken reparation? But that was a far-fetched idea. The Gillises had not sought her out; she had come to them in answer to an advertisement, as a hundred girls might have done. And had George written his name in the cell? She scrutinized it carefully. It looked like his "G," but the other letters were not so familiar. Of course writing with a nail would make a difference.

But if George had not written his name there, who had? What would another man want to write "George Barnes" on the wall for? Why not his own name? And then Grace remembered something she had once read about idiots and weak-minded persons

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—about their habit of believing they were not themselves but some famous man. It was conceivable that some weak-minded individual had read much about Barnes, when the papers were full of his case, and the writing in the cell had been the foolish result. But—but—and all sorts of buts.

Besides, there were more than one George Barnes in the world—another man of the same name might have been in the cell. For she could not be sure of the writing. There was only one thing to do—to ask Mr. Gillis, although to do so meant putting herself at the mercy of his veracity, as it did putting herself at the mercy of his anger. What answer could she make if he had a legitimate explanation concerning the padded cell, and wanted to know why she had forced her way into his study. He could have her arrested.

But, nevertheless, she would ask him. She had gone too far now to falter, and, besides, this might be a clue, might be the beginning of a way to help George. She would ask Gillis as soon as he came home.

SO SHE switched off the cell-light, closed the door and drew the slide across the grating, and pulled the curtain across the cell door again. Then she turned out one of the study lights and walked to the door. To her horror, it opened before she reached it, and Gillis stepped rapidly inside, and closed the door behind him.

For a moment neither spoke—the girl petrified, the man pale and obviously frightened. Then she pointed dramatically to the curtain that hid the cell.

"Mr. Gillis, I have found something."

"Yes," he said cunningly, recovering himself. "Yes, my dear. Then please show me what you have found."

She foolishly assumed that she had the upper hand—that the man was afraid of her—and she threw back the curtain and opened the cell without taking any precaution, without even watching him closely. She was badly "rattled," of course, but her carelessness in stepping into the cell and switching on the light was as inexcusable as it was remarkable. Astonished at the ease of the thing, the man stepped up behind her, and the next moment she was sprawling on the padded floor, the door was shut, and Gillis was looking at her malevolently through the grating.

"Found something, did you?" he hissed. "Well, make the most of it."

Her first feeling was one of anger. She had let herself be trapped as easily as the heroine of a silly novel, who only exists to get into danger from which the hero may rescue her. Then, before she could speak, he shut the grating and fastened it on the outside, and she heard him draw the curtain, or, more likely, fancied she did. A moment later, the light went out in the cell, as Gillis disconnected the main switch, and the girl was shivering with fear in the thickest darkness she had ever known.

And immediately, all idea of George having ever been in the cell vanished. Gillis was in no way connected with George's disappearance. Clearly, she saw what his foul business was, and why he went on trips into the country districts, and why his wife was so distressed. It was all so clear that she wondered at her former blindness—the blindness which had gotten her into this mess. Why, the very existence of the padded cell, considered in connection with the trips Gillis made, should have given her the solution of the problem of the Gillis household.

The man was a "white slaver." There was no doubt about it, and Grace would only become another piece of property—unless Mrs. Gillis successfully interceded for her, which was very unlikely, since to do so, to allow Grace her freedom, would be to jeopardize the freedom of the Gillises.

Grace had read the "white slave" columns of the newspapers, and, like the majority of women, she had believed all the sordid tale. Consequently, she was terribly distressed, and, indeed, would have probably tried to end her life if there had been any way of doing so. For intense darkness makes to a negative state of mind. Taken with enforced confinement, thought of suicide becomes almost a certainty. It flashed across her consciousness that she had read this somewhere. And, with a groan, she saw a further proof of the need for the padded cell, where one could not hurt oneself.

As the time passed her thoughts became more confused, if greater confusion were possible. She began to think of George again, getting off the floor and trying to find the scratching on the frame of the grating—a weird notion coming to her that she would not feel so lonely if she could run her finger

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over it. But, although she found the grating, the writing was too lightly indented for her touch to be sure of it.

She lay down on the floor again, wondering if they would ever bring her anything to eat or drink, and her thoughts of George took the channel that he had been on the track of the white slavers, and that they had captured him and put him in this very cell, where just before he died of starvation he scratched his name under the grating, with a fork which his cruel captors had given him to make his hunger all the greater mockery. But she was sure George was not dead.

She felt annoyed with him for believing he was more clever than he really was. She would not let him go mixing into things out of his mental depth again. He was all right, but he was not a genius, even if, like all men, he thought he was. She must have slept a little, because she was distinctly aware of waking out of a dream. Then she got the curious notion that she was sitting in a dentist's chair, about to have a tooth extracted. She didn't want to have a tooth out—she had no decayed teeth—so she began to struggle.

But it was no avail. True, the chair was a curiously large one—she seemed to be wandering about in it, just as she might walk about a room—but she could not escape from it. It was a horrible nightmare—she was telling herself this—with the taste and smell of the gas the dentist used just as real as if she were not dreaming at all.

SHE awoke, still in the dark, feeling as she had felt after her one small surgical operation. She shivered at the recollection of Gillis and the padded cell, and sat up suddenly—her head coming into painful contact with some boards. Fearfully, she lay down again, and for the first time realized that there was a pillow under her head, and that a blanket covered her. But the boards?

To her right, when she groped with frantic hands, she found boards: hard, unyielding boards, and the same substance barred her explorations to the left. Boards—overhead, underneath and all around. She screamed in a positive ecstasy of terror—she had been taken from the padded cell, wrapped in blankets and hurriedly buried in a coffin many sizes too large for her. She was buried alive. For some minutes she lay like a paralyzed woman. Then she laughed with a self-contempt that was sickening.

"You little fool," she muttered. "Oh, you little fool—you're in a bunk on board a ship," at the same time lifting her left hand over the boards that blocked its progress, over the side of the bunk.

But her fear had been as excusable as her rapid sizing up of her situation was wonderful—she had never been in a bunk before—and her experience in the cell, culminating in an anesthetic, had given her ample excuse for frazzled nerves. Gillis' face, peering through the grating had looked murder. It was really surprising she was alive. Why hadn't he killed her? Perhaps she had been brought on this gently moving ship because it would be easier to dispose of her body. But that did not explain why she had been brought aboard alive. Then she resolutely gave up thinking. She heard the click of a lock, a flood of light dazzled her, and she turned toward the sound, blinking. Presently, she made out a smiling Japanese woman, holding a tray on which was set an attractive breakfast. The cabin had been lit with electricity, and Grace wondered at its darkness, until the Japanese unscrewed a clever port deadlight, letting in the sunlight and switching off the artificial.

"Boss say sleep better in dark," she explained, smiling.

This was astonishing. Grace, expecting death, was being treated as an honored guest. And then a terrible memory took away her appetite for breakfast—the white slave traffic. It was only natural that the owners of a beautiful woman should show solicitude regarding her beauty. Beauty was a valuable asset. It would be protected, even to its "beauty sleeps," by the vilest of the vile. Just as a horse or other money-bringing animal is taken care of. And that explained why she was alive, why she had been given ether and brought on board the ship.

Perhaps she was already sold, and on her way to her owner. Well, there would be some way of killing herself. She drank the tea, but could not eat, and the Japanese refused to answer any questions—pretending not to understand them. Then Grace pleaded with her for information, but only the eternal "no savee" of the Oriental answered her. So the girl handed her the empty cup, and buried her face in the pillow.

But she was too distressed to remain quiet. She was as fully clothed as when she

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had entered Gillis' study, and so, when the Japanese left her she climbed out of the bunk rather unsteadily, and began to walk about the little cabin. Through the port, nothing but the far horizon and a smiling sea greeted her—so the ship must be well away from land, and Grace must have slept many hours—and the cabin, although neat enough and spotlessly clean, was furnished with only the barest necessities.

There was nothing to do but wait in a fever of anxiety for her captor's next move, and speculate on the chances of suicide. So she walked up and down aimlessly, but, being a very brave girl, she managed to laugh at herself when she found herself wishing for a mirror. Then the Japanese came back.

"Master say you come with me to him, please if can so," explained the Japanese.

This was another surprise, for Grace knew enough of the Japanese mangling of English to be able to interpret the message into a request for an interview, either in her cabin or in the cabin of the man sending the message. Curious to see more, she made a futile attempt to tidy up, and signified to the Japanese that she would follow.

There was something comforting about the large main cabin into which her stateroom opened. It seemed to the girl that it once more united her with the things of every day from which she had too long been separated. The sunlight, also, reflecting from the brasswork of the large skylight, offered a feeling of cheerfulness which would not be denied, as they passed through a great splash of it before the Japanese knocked on the door of another stateroom.

"Come in."

The door opened, and Grace saw a man sitting at a desk. He rose, bowed and offered a chair. She was surprised—tremendously surprised, perhaps expresses it. What she had expected she probably did not quite know herself; but if a pirate with pistols in his sash, a red handkerchief 'round his head, and thigh-boots, had cursingly bawled at her to "come to an anchor," she would have been far less astonished. The man who nodded to the Japanese to leave them might have been a successful lawyer, telling a clerk to leave him alone with a client.

It was too much. Coming on the top of her imaginations, and turning them all askew, it gave a dangerous shock to her jaded nerves. She sank into the chair, and laughed hysterically.

"What's the matter?" asked the man, quite evidently startled, and acting as any man would under the circumstances, unless he were a doctor. "Can I do anything?"

So, he would still act, still pretend to be decent, she thought. Anger came to her assistance.

"Do anything?" she sneered. "Why am I here? Why was I abducted this way? Why am I on board this ship? What have I done that I should be treated this way?"

"That's just what I was going to ask you," was his astonishing answer.

"You mean you don't know?"

"Exactly. I should have heard, but Gillis appears to have lost his head. Will you please tell me the immediate happenings prior to your finding yourself here."

Grace was speechless. The man did not appear to be acting a part—and, indeed, why should he, what had he to gain by doing so? He seemed quite sincere, and anxious to know.

"The padded cell," she stammered.

"Yes," he prompted. "But were you put there for safety or ——"

"Put?" she cried. "Why, that white slaver threw me into the cell. And where are you taking me to?" she ended in a scream.

"Hush, hush," he said gently. "And don't be absurd. Gillis is no more a white slaver, as you call it, than I am."

At this she laughed harshly.

"No, no more," she sneered. "Perhaps not quite as much. He's probably only the servant, while you are the master; or, should I call you, the head salesman?"

The man flushed.

"Your insult is perhaps excusable," he said quietly, and Grace felt curiously ashamed, "but it hurts just the same. Neither Gillis nor I are white slavers, or criminals of any stamp. If you will tell me what actually happened I can no doubt clear up this quite unhappy situation."

GRACE was bewildered. Here was a new mystery, one with which George Barnes had evidently no connection. She had not told Gillis about finding Barnes' name in the cell, so that it had no bearing on her being aboard the ship. But why had Gillis been so upset? She remembered his malevolent face looking at her through the grating. Then there was his wife's nervousness, and, lastly, the anesthetic and the waking on the ship. It

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was all most mysterious. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to tell this rather nice-looking man all she knew. At any rate, it would do no harm.

"Well?" asked the man.

"Suppose I refuse to tell you?"

"Your privilege. But it will make it harder for me to help you. It seems to me that there is some mistake, and I want to straighten it out."

She grasped eagerly at the kindness in his voice.

"I was Mrs. Gillis' companion," she said. "I went to his study to have a look around. I thought there was something wrong in the house, because Mrs. Gillis seemed so nervous about her husband's business. Behind a curtain in the study I found a padded cell. I looked into it, but there was no one inside. Just as I was leaving the study, Gillis came in. I pointed to the curtain, and said, 'Mr. Gillis, I have found something.' Then I showed him the cell. He pushed me into it, looked at me horribly through the grating, and put out the light. After a time, I fell asleep, and the next thing I knew I was here on this ship.

"Yes," he replied, "just by chance I was about to leave port. Otherwise you might have been sent to—well, and, again, you might not. For I think there has been a mistake. But you didn't tell me why you opened the door of the cell—giving Gillis the opportunity to push you into the place?"

He looked at her steadily. She was compelled to admit that he had fine eyes.

"I—I," she stammered. "I found my sister's handkerchief in the cell. She had been missing for a year. Gillis is a white slaver. I opened the door to show him the handkerchief."

"I am sorry you said that," he said gently.

"W-hy?"

"Because you know it is not true. Gillis is not a white slaver, and if you had found your sister's handkerchief in the cell you would not have allowed it to remain there. Apart from the sentimental value, it would have made very good evidence for the police. You are making a mistake in not confiding in me—although I admit appearances are hardly in my favor. But that is your affair. I don't wish you to be lonely, so I will let you pay a visit to a fellow voyager. He will, also, be glad of your company."

"A man?" she cried.

"But a very quiet and harmless gentleman. It will be a kindness on your part if you will talk to him and cheer him up. Like you, he refuses to talk, so I can do nothing. If he would talk, I don't believe I would have to keep him here. But he is dangerous until we know what his ideas are."

Her voice shook.

"I am in your power," she said bravely. "You can force me to visit this man—I will go without force. But I will find some way of killing myself," and she broke into tears.

"Tut, tut!" He patted her shoulder, and she did not try to stop him. "Here, look at me. Do I look like a rotter. There are a lot of things I can not tell you, but I give you my word of honor—and I do not give that lightly—that you will come to no harm on this ship. I will protect you as if you were my sister."

And he rang a bell until the Japanese came. And she had to admit that she trusted him, although she coppered the wager she put on his word by the reminder that some devils can look and talk like angels. Then he laughed, and failing to hear any satyr in that laugh she smiled back at him, and followed the Japanese across the main cabin again.

"Now," said the man when she had gone, "perhaps they will talk, and I can hear enough to chance getting this burden off my shoulders."

And Grace, following the "come in" that answered the knock of the Japanese, stood at the open door watching a man who lay on a leather settee, looking at her through the cabin shadows. Then, obeying an irresistible impulse, she sent the Jap away, closed the door and walked toward the couch, the sunlight that streamed through the port rather blinding her.

Suddenly the man jumped to his feet, stretched out his arms to her, unable to speak the words crowding for utterance on his lips. For a moment she was alarmed. Her bosom heaved. Should she cry for help? Then the ship rolled, and the sunlight went away from the port. She saw, but doubted her eyes.

She heard a stifled voice say—

"My God, I must be dreaming again."

She panted the more painfully, but there was no longer any thought of crying for help. Because it was her one desire in life to be with that man—forever.

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How long she lay in his arms without speaking she never knew. In such a haze of happiness time is a nonentity, and the world of little worth. But at length she gently disengaged herself from his embrace, and half-laughing, half-crying, made ineffectual pats to straighten her hair, trembling:

"George—tell me—what does it mean? Tell me."

And George Barnes, for he it was, held her closer. "There is so much to tell," he eventually became coherent.

"Tell me all—begin at the beginning," she commanded deliciously.

"Well, I'll try," he refreshed himself with another sequence of kisses.

"Yes, never mind me just now, I want to hear how it all happened, and everything. "Begin when you first began to be upset, and stay late at the office," she ordered.

"Well, you are the only person I ever intended to tell. Others have tried to get me to talk, but I wouldn't. But I have rehearsed over and over what I would tell you, and here goes. You see, alongside my desk at the office was a large bronze statue of a lion. A very old thing that seemed to have been put there because there was no other place for it. It stood on a heavy iron pedestal, and everybody had become so accustomed to it that we took no more notice of it than we did of the floor. One day I happened to rest my hands on it in a certain way, about the middle of the top of the animal's back.

"To my great surprise, a small door opened in the back, like a door to a great iron safe, only disproportionately small. As it opened, a piece of paper fell into my hand, and at that moment another clerk walked across the room toward me. Whatever put it into my head to keep the thing to myself I don't know, but I hurriedly closed the door in the back again, and stuffed the paper clumsily into my coat pocket. As I did so, the paper, being old, tore, leaving a piece in my hand. The other clerk asked—

" 'What, Barnes, have you torn your ledger?'

"I, of course, laughed it off, saying—

" 'No, that's just an old letter I'm tearing up.' And to make it look more realistic, I walked across to the fireplace, tore the piece up smaller, and threw it into the flames. I was sorry to do it, but, unless I wanted to let everybody know about my find, I had to. I have sometimes wished I had told everybody, but you are the very first.

"WELL, that night I fished out the paper from my pocket. It had torn into two pieces, one larger than the other, the piece I burned belonging to the middle of it. Here is what I saw."

He picked up a writing-tablet and pencil from the table, and wrote.

"They took everything from me," he explained, while he was writing, "when I was caught, but there were none of the statue papers in my possession, because I made a point of putting them back after going over them."

He handed Grace two pieces of paper, on the first of which he had written:

2-27-30 31-54-56-12-8-19-55 18-73-31-4-48-49-35-11 62-21-11-9-46-17-19-6 9-49-43-48-51 2-27-30 29-46-17-44-73 51-62-32-70-69-49-64 68-27-8 43-6-31-52-16-46 17-33-26-41-47 68-65-31 11-65-47 68-6 62-3-12 42-62-75-68-27-42-29 75-62-43-24-6 31-4-10 3-68-62 24-4-47 11-62-42-6 74-62 31-72-44-68 75-32 52-39-4-44-16 68-69-31 32-42 75-68-73 43-24-63-32-49-6 68-69-70 31-17-56-12-8-43-55 75-20-6-42 55-73-65-39-11-6-47 17 *

* paper torn here

On the smaller piece of paper George had written:

42-38-22 40-6-61-75 61-62-63 54-31-25-63-65-44-17 62-28 75-68-6 21-53-48-64 6-42-47-67-17-66-62-72-63 74 *

* another tear.

"Well," he asked, smiling at her puzzled frown, "can you make anything out of it?"

She shook her head.

"Can you?"

"I can now; but for a long time I couldn't. That statue was chock full of papers, all in the same sort of contradictory code. That was why I began to stay at the office, trying to puzzle the thing out. It's simple, in a way, but therein lies its cleverness. I mean you must have the key to solve it. No ordinary cryptographic methods will do. For instance, the letter 'e' is the one most used in our language; but if you look for the most used number and then call it e, you get all

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mixed up. But I got it in the end."

"You dear, clever boy," she exclaimed, kissing him.

"Maybe—look at the mess it got me into. But I've been forgetting. I've been so full of this thing, and so knocked galley west at seeing you, that I never asked you how you got here."

"Never mind that," she answered, "tell me all about yourself, first. You came first, you know. Now, how did you solve the thing?"

"But you haven't been hurt? You're all right?"

"I am, and very glad to be here. Please George, I am so interested."

"All right. You see, I got it by a bit of luck, in a way. In the pedestal, which I ought to call a safe, because that was what it had been used for, there were hundreds of these code writings, and a few not in code. These were bits of notes, or receipts, and things like that; but there was one that interested me more than the others, so I made a copy of it and put it in my pocket. It just goes to show how one's subconscious mind tries to force the conscious mind to see the thing it sees first. For my subsconscious mind knew that I had the clue, but the conscious took an awful time to see it. Here is the thing I made a copy of, and it contains the key to all the cypher writings."

He showed her another piece of paper:

Th' waters under th' earth
By the king's most exzellent cardinal
Pray Jesus forgive his quest.

"Make anything out of that?" he asked as he gave it to her.

"No," she laughed, "except that the 'e' is missing from the word 'the' twice, and, and—why 'excellent' is spelled wrong."

"You clever girl," he hugged her enthusiastically, "that's it."

"That's what, you rough old thing?"

"That 'z' is the clue. But it took me a long time to see it."

"I don't see it yet."

"Can you guess who wrote it—who the cardinal is?"

"No—who?"

"Wolsey," he answered, lowering his voice.

"What—the one Shakespeare wrote about? The one who appears in 'King Henry the ——' "

"Yes, and it was just like his cunning. He began the whole thing. I found a paper, in code, telling all this. He was the first link in the chain of which I became a sort of link. But it was Francis Bacon who organized the thing. And Baconians would find some significance in the affair."

"Organized what?" she whispered, impressed by his manner.

"I'll tell you in a moment. Just now let's go into this key. You see that 'z'. Well, for a long time I couldn't make out why it was there, and then it came like a flash. Wolsey wrote what I have just shown you to make a perfect code for communication and records. To make a long story short, that 'z' is the thirty-seventh letter from the beginning of that queer sentence about waters under the earth; so I put thirty-seven over it, and counted back to the first t, and forward to the last t. That gave me:

```
 1-2  3-4-5-6-7-8  9-10-11-12-13  14-15
Th  w a t e r s  u n d e r  t h
          16-17-18-19-20
             e a r t h
21-22  23-24-25  26-27-28-29-30  31-32-33-34
B y  t h e  k i n g s  m o s t
          35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43
             e x z e l l e n t
          44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51
             c a r d i n a l
          52-53-54-55  56-57-58-59-60
             p r a y  J e s u s
61-62-63-64-65-66-67   68-69-70   71-72-73-74-75
f o r g i v e   h i s   q u e s t
```

"Now, let us take the paper I tore when the other clerk came across the room. Apply the letters under the numbers as I have just written them. Then, on the first, larger piece we get:

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2-27-30  31-54-56-12-8-19-55
H i s  m a j e s t y
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"You see how it goes?"

"Yes," answered the girl, greatly impressed.

"Well, then, without troubling to write all the figures down again, we'll just translate. And the larger piece of paper gives us: 'His majesty remained obdurate until his grace, losing his temper, asked him did he owe nothing to the man who had done so much to place him on the throne. His majesty then yielded, a—' the paper is torn there, at the letter 'a', and I burned what came next. You see how clever it is—almost every letter has several different numbers?"

"Yes—go on."

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"All right. Then the small piece of torn paper gives us:

42-38-22 40-6-61-75
N e y l e f t

"And without bothering to write all the numbers, we get, in full: 'Ney left for America on the brig *Endeavour*, s *,' where the paper is torn. The full translation, not including the piece I threw in the fire, is, then:

" 'His majesty remained obdurate until his grace, losing his temper, asked him did he owe nothing to the man who had done so much to place him on the throne. His majesty then yielded, a * (paper torn) Ney left for America on the brig *Endeavour*, s * (tear). Understand, Grace, dear?"

"Not quite."

"Marshal Ney, dear. Napoleon's general, you know—or don't you know, sweetheart?'

"I don't."

"You dear little ignoramus. Well, it was this way: when old Nap escaped from Elba, Louis, the King of France, sent Ney to get him. Ney boasted that he would bring Napoleon back in an iron cage, but when he met the wonder-worker, he went over to his side. When poor Ney saw that Waterloo was going against the French—owing to his own lack of energy at Quatre-Bras, and Grouchy's fondness for strawberries—he did his best to get killed. Two horses were shot under him, and at the last he led the Old Guard on foot, with his uniform shot to tatters, but without a scratch on his skin.

"When the allies restored the cringing Louis, and sent Napoleon to St. Helena, Ney was tried for treason. Treason, being, mind you, fighting for the Emperor of France and for France, instead of running away with Louis the Bourbon. He was found guilty, and history says he was shot. But fancy shooting a man like that—with the children and their nurses walking in the sunshine of the park just by.

"His 'grace' means the Duke of Wellington, and the king is, of course, the King of France. Wellington has often been censured for not being magnanimous enough to save the life of his great rival, Ney—'the bravest of the brave.' He did save it—or, rather, was the means of having it saved, as the paper tells—but he could not answer his critics by telling them of his argument with the French king, and Ney's going to America, because to do so would have meant the exposure of those who did the actual saving."

"Who are they?" she whispered.

"THE society Wolsey originated, and Bacon organized later. The society called 'The Waters Under the Earth,' the records of whose dealings with our Government—for they work for any Government or person who will pay—are hidden in that pedestal. Wellington, big as he was, dared not clear himself of the stigma of letting Ney be shot, because he was afraid of the society. And that's why I am here; because I was caught prying into the records of the society. I was surprised they let me live. I am kept here because they are afraid I will publish what I have discovered. The name's significant: 'Waters'—something active; 'Under the Earth' hidden from all.'

"But I don't yet understand, dear. Can not you explain so I will? Just go back to what you did yourself."

"All right. Of course, like many others, I had heard of secret documents, only known to the king and the head of the Government, who swore under oath not to speak of their existence. And when that pedestal opened so unexpectedly I found myself right in with them. There were the secret records. As a decent Englishman, I didn't want to do any harm, but I was, also, so darned interested that I went ahead—staying late at the office, as you know, and getting all worked up and nervous because I couldn't translate the documents.

"Then I saw the significance of that paper Wolsey wrote, about 'Th' waters' etc., and worked out the key as I showed you. I guess I'm repeating myself, but I can't help it, sweetheart. I applied the solution to several documents, and translated them all, just as I did the one I managed to remember—the torn one I just showed you. Then, all excited, I ran and telephoned you. But they must have suspected something, because a Secret Service man grabbed me at the 'phone—I let the receiver drop—and stuck a gun in my ribs, saying he would shoot if I opened my mouth.

"They took me in a cab—the one who grabbed me and another—and put me in a padded cell, where——"

"Why, I was there, too," she cried.

"Tell me," he exclaimed, holding her close.

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So she told him all that had occurred since his disappearance.

"And what about the bottles?" she asked when she concluded her narrative at the point where she had found him in the cabin.

"I'll come to that," he answered. "I was kept in that cell, and treated all right, for several days, with nobody speaking a word, and your 'friend' Gillis bringing my grub. Then I was asked if I would go quietly or otherwise, and, as it looked like a small choice, I went quietly to this ship. There are only about twelve in the crew, but whether they know who they are paid by is something I don't know, as I have never had the chance of asking them.

"But it would be easy enough to have a different crew every voyage. All the boss here would have to do would be to tell the captain that I owned the ship, and that he was my doctor and man of business. Pass me off as a harmless lunatic, you see. And that looks like what has been done, because I once heard two of the crew laughing about my messages."

"Ah!" whispered Grace.

"The apparent Japanese servant is the man's wife, and can talk English as well as I can."

"Somehow—it's queer, of course—but I thought that was the case," said Grace. "But, the bottles, dear—tell me about the messages. They stirred all the world, you know."

He laughed rather bitterly.

"Well, dear, when I got aboard here, the chap who talked to you told me that the best thing I could do would be to tell him all I knew, and what I meant to do with the information I had got out of the coded papers. He was awfully anxious to know, but I refused to tell. I was so mad at being made prisoner—although I suppose it was justified—that I shut up like an oyster, and made up my mind to publish all I knew, if I ever got the chance, and get some influential papers to demand a further investigation.

"I might be disbelieved, of course, but the subject fascinates me, and I want to learn more about it. Then, when I refused to talk, the man in charge here tried to hypnotize me. But it is not possible to hypnotize a man unless he allows you, so he failed. But I pretended to weaken, and to further the pretense I wrote those fool messages and asked for bottles to send them in. At first, the chap looked for a code in them, but after a bit he let me have all the bottles I required.

"They served a double purpose—for I was sure that at least one message would get into the papers—they let you know I was alive, without necessarily giving you any unpleasant publicity, and made the chap in charge here think I was going soft in the head. It seemed that I was to be labeled 'harmless to all Government secrets' before being allowed to go free. At least, I thought that was it, so I played at being foolish."

"But why, dear? What good will it do you to go any further with this thing?"

"Probably no good, but it's the fascination that holds me. Think of the secrets. Why, I know that neither Charles the First nor Mary Queen of Scots was beheaded. To find substitutes for people was the main reason why Wolsey founded the society—he was a bit scared about his own head at times, you know. And have you never noticed how many men suddenly disappear? Where do they all go?

"Some are dead, of course, either by being murdered or by suicide. But so many are reported to have been seen again. And these are generally in some Government position. You remember that famous English general who gained his commission from the ranks, and who was supposed to have shot himself some time ago in Paris? Well, lots of people will say they have seen him, during the years he has to live——"

"To live?" broke in Grace.

"Yes, Mac did not die. I found the paper on which the record is kept, in the same old code. It was thought best for all concerned, including the service, that he should disappear. So, for a big fee, which the taxpayers paid without being aware of it, the society staged that very striking drama. I don't suppose the morgue charged much for the leading actor, though."

The girl shuddered.

"Oh, George, don't bother any more with this thing. It seems to me that this society does more good than harm, and it also seems that the Government needs such a society."

"That was what Wolsey thought."

She nestled closer to him.

"Now I understand why Scotland Yard did not try to find you, and why the papers acted as they did," she whispered. "The Government must have given them a broad

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hint. But, George, why not drop it—take me instead? Don't you want me more than to study a lot of old papers."

He strained her hungerily to his breast.

"You know I do," he said.

THE shadows had filled the cabin, so rapidly had time passed for them, and they were suddenly startled by the coming of the electric light. A knock on the door, and they began to move to opposite ends of the couch.

"Come," called George.

The man in charge of the ship entered, smiling.

"You will pardon my listening to your conversation," he asked.

"Oh, I expected it," said George shortly.

"It was all for your good," replied the man of the ship. "You have refused so obstinately to talk, when all we wanted to be sure of was that you meditated no harm. If you could have satisfied us on that score, you would have been free long since."

"What?" shouted George. "Do you mean that?"

"Certainly." He gave George a cigar, and lit one himself, after his gesture brought a nod of permission from Grace. "Certainly I mean it. I sent the lady in here in the hope that you would talk to her, but I never dreamed of your happy relationship."

"But why was she brought here?" asked George gruffly.

"Well, the only reason I can think of is that Gillis lost his head completely. He is a very faithful Government servant, with the rather dangerous job of picking up and arresting dangerous characters, such as foreign spies. Hence the padded cell, to eliminate all chance of a prisoner getting into communication with his friends, who are, of course, Government enemies and sometimes anarchists. His dangerous trips have worried his wife into a nervous conditon, but he is too faithful to the Government—which would have trouble finding another like him—to quit, and he tries to cheer his wife with a great deal of love.

"When he looked at the young lady through the grating of the cell, he was like a bulldog defending his master's property. Then, wanting the responsibility off his already too heavily weighted shoulders, he sent her to me. He, of course, knows in a vague way of the society, which trusts him."

The man of the ship found a chair.

"Now," he went on, "suppose you ask me a few questions, which I will answer if I can, and then promise to forget all you know. Then I will set you free, and—shall I give the bride away, or be best man?"

"But why do you say this now?" asked the puzzled George.

"It is one of the society's axioms that no man will jeopardize the happiness of the woman he truly loves. If you broke the promise you will give as the price of your freedom, unhappiness would come to both of you. We have a prison for unforgivable cases, you know. You two really love each other. Therefore, the bond of your love is all the indorsement your promise will require."

"We will give, and keep, our promise," said George. "And I am beginning to understand that the society is even more powerful than I thought. If we broke the promise, the society could grab us in no time, eh?"

"If there were any chance of your breaking it, you would not go free," said the man of the ship. "I have certain psychological proof—unknown as yet to the world of science—that you will not break it. But, of course, the society could get you wherever you were. Now, is there much more I can tell you before dinner?"

"Does the society ever do anything cruel?" asked Grace.

"Only negatively. That is, in not actively trying to prevent pain. We try to follow that Higher Power, Who has evidently decided not to prevent pain. God could stop all pain, could He not? Well, since He doesn't, He must have a reason—a more far-reaching reason than that taught by biology. So, we have organized no slumming or charitable institutions. You know that we have kept you here because you refused to speak. And—you didn't fool me when I pretended to hypnotize you.

"When you heard two of the crew laughing about your bottles, you only overheard what you had deduced—that the crew is not in my confidence, is changed frequently, and believes that you, the owner, are not quite yourself. When I send you ashore, I will have to tell them of a wonderful recovery, and let them make wild guesses about the lady."

They all laughed.

"And," asked George, "Wolsey did found the society?"

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"Yes, although sporadic things like it had been attempted by isolated men. As you thought, the idea of self-preservation was behind the effort. Beheadings were so common that men of prominence wanted a sort of insurance against the shifting affections of kings and queens. In twenty years there will be neither kings nor queens. The society has decided to make its first positive, world-wide effort in this regard.

"So, Wolsey began to find men who would procure substitutes at executions—either criminals, obtained through bribed guards, and given a good time and some powerful drug, or men near death from disease, as in Ney's case, who were glad to have their dependents provided for at the expense of dying a few days earlier—sometimes they were glad to be out of their pain. Speaking of drugs, it may interest the lady to know that the Inner Circle of the society has so perfected a drug that she walked on board this ship, quite unconscious."

"Gracious goodness," cried the startled Grace.

"The 'Inner Circle,' " asked Barnes. "I did not find anything about that."

"Wish you had told me that before—I was going to ask you. But now I will explain. As I said, and you discovered, Wolsey founded the society but Francis Bacon organized it upon the lines it still follows. Wonderful man, Bacon. Of course, he wrote the plays. His illegitimate son was the society's first president, and then Bacon propounded this idea. He said: 'The world has seen many great minds. But such minds were the result of merely haphazard mating. This being so, what wonderful brains would result if brains were made the object of marriage—breeding for brains, shall we call it?'

"He, also, discovered a law of heredity which is lost to the world. And the Inner Circle of the society is the result of Bacon's idea of breeding for brains. There are fourteen in the Inner Circle. I am not one of them, but in the presence of the least intelligent Herbert Spencer would seem like a babbling child, and Plato like a boy who never matured into the minor poet he was destined to be. And the president is an intelligence so wonderful that I can think of no comparison."

He paused, and Grace asked a very natural question:

"But if there are such clever people why have they done nothing for the world? Why don't they use their brains for the world's benefit, instead of merely finding substitutes for men who are condemned to death?"

"The Inner Circle has little to do with that work," he answered. "They leave it to myself and another, merely receiving a part of the large fee paid by Government, to provide for their simple needs. We work for any one who will pay, and has a legitimate need of our services. One of the Inner Circle passes on that. But we are always neutral, and belong to no nation.

"But, as regards the first part of your question, it seems to be a law that man must help himself, and in not scattering its great knowledge broadcast, the Inner Circle only does as that Greater Intelligence does, believing that what God does is best to follow—allowing men of normal brain to work out the destinies of the world. And I am told that the Inner Circle sees why this is best."

"But," asked Grace, have they discovered if there's a life after this, and if there are people on Mars?"

She was like a girl at a fortune-teller's.

He smiled at her eagerness.

"They have. But the first is for each to prove for himself, and the second will shortly be answered in the affirmative by the telescopes of the world, in conjunction with stellar photography."

"And—we are free?" asked the practical George.

"I have your solemn promise to never speak a word about the existence of the society?"

"You have," they cried in chorus.

"Then you will be set free as soon as we can make land. A sum of money will be given you with which to make a start. You must not go to England, of course—the Government stipulated that—but as neither of you has any relatives there to mourn you, that will not matter.

"By the way," he paused with his hand on the door, "Miss Curtiss might have buried her identity by the simple expedient of changing her name, because we had no war with her. It was the sheerest chance she answered the advertisement which got her the situation. Then Gillis happened to mention the name of his wife's companion—speaking very favorably of her—when making an oral report to a superior. He was

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told not to bother the lady with questions—much to his disgust—unless she committed some overt act of a suspicious nature.

"She did—" he smiled broadly—"but I'll confess that we made the slip of not knowing who this young lady really was until she came into this room. For, as I said, Gillis was so disturbed that he sent me no report, and I was at sea when he mentioned Miss Curtiss' name to another officer. But it's all right now.

"I will see you both at dinner in the saloon," and he bowed himself out.

"Free," whispered Grace. "But do you believe it all?"

"No," said George under his breath. "There is a society, all right, and this man is the head of it; but there's no Inner Circle of great brains. If there were, he wouldn't have set us free on his own. But I will admit that he told me all the time that if I would tell him the whole truth, so he could be sure when he told the Government that I was not dangerous—that I was a patriotic Englishman who would betray no secrets—then he would let me go.

"But I was so interested, and hoped to find out more, that I became obstinate, and refused to talk. So he's telling the truth when he says that the society are a fairly decent bunch. But the Inner Circle—bosh!"

A FEW evenings later. A sea as calm as glass, with a full moon mirrored. Ashore, a sleepy little village, with a half-dozen fishing boats at anchor. Eight bells, midnight, were struck aboard the ship. There was the sound of a boat being lowered from its davits.

"You are going to be very happy, Barnes," said the man of the ship. "When you get ashore, pretend you are on a walking tour; then go to whatever city you mean to begin life in anew."

"But what is the name of the place?" asked the practical Barnes.

"Bridgeport," was the reply. "Here comes your boat. You are free."

"Yes," said Barnes, "but what country is it?"

"The Land of the Free," smiled the man of the ship.

THE CALL OF THE WANDER-WIND

By ROBERT A. MASTERS

I'M AS restless as the ocean, as the drifting wander-wind
That drives the spray before it on the mountains of the sea;
I can not bear the quiet of my homely little cabin;
I long to take the trail again and travel fancy-free.

For I want to greet the dawning on the winding yellow road
When all the world is singing and the grass is wet with dew,
And I want to seek the shelter of a town when night is falling;
There within a cozy tavern meet a good old friend or two.

For your kisses can not hold me when I hear the soft command
That the wander-wind will whisper e'er I know your love for long—
Though I break your heart in parting, I shall know no pang of sorrow
As I greet the world before me with my happy tramping song:

Long trail, wrong trail;
Trail that has no turning;
Dare road, fair road;
Road where life is burning!
Old trail, bold trail—
Never question why.
Life road, strife road,
Follow till you die!

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

STILL further reports of lost treasure come in from members of our Camp-Fire, this time from California. One of these corroborates the account we have had from Wolcott LeClear Beard of Atahualpa's treasure.

The wreck of the old side-wheeler *Golden Gate* lies where she was beached ablaze, some three kilometers South of Graham's Head and about forty-five North of Manzanillo, on the west coast of Mexico. Well up in the breakers, nothing showed, at the time of which I write, but a few ribs and the remains of one paddle-box.

HAVING been on the coast for a number of years I was of course familiar with the tale of the treasure safe, containing millions in gold, that was supposed to be hidden somewhere under the shifting sand that partly covered her timbers, as well as with the histories of the various unsuccessful expeditions that from time to time had tried to recover the treasure.

In May of 1912 I had occasion to visit the town of Zihuatlan, a few miles inland from the old wreck, and whilst there learned from a creditable source what was locally believed to have become of the ill-fated *Golden Gate's* treasure.

SEVERAL years after the ship was beached a simple-minded burro-driver, following after some strayed burros, came down to the shore one morning after a severe storm. Arriving opposite the hulk, he found that a portion of the cabins had been torn away and cast up on the sands. Rummaging about amongst the débris he came upon the rusted iron safe, its door gaping open and still holding several bags of gold.

Hurrying back to Zihuatlan, the *arriero* told his compadre, Juan Murgia, who was like himself a burro-driver in the employ of the richest man in the district. Next morning the two hurried down to the beach but, finding that the load was too heavy for them, decided, at Juan's suggestion, to bury the gold till the next day when they would return with burros to carry it away.

Arriving upon the scene for the second time they found their cache looted, not a single piece of gold being left.

FROM this point on Juan's *compadre* of the simple mind is automatically eliminated from the story while Juan's fortunes began to mend with leaps and bounds, so much so that in a short time he was the richest man in that portion of the state and had married the daughter of his old *amo*.

As to proofs, I can only say that I have known Don Juan and his wife and that occasionally the coast Indians were wont to bring into town American gold-pieces which they said were found on the beach after storms.

ANOTHER tale of lost treasure that might well rank with those told by Mr. Reynolds is that of the royal treasure of the Tesoreria of San Blas, Tepic.

San Blas, up to the time of the Revolution, was the principal Pacific port of Mexico and the Royal Treasury was the temporary deposit of vast treasures on their way to Spain. The sudden arrival of the Republican troops found a great many Spanish families, with all of their convertible wealth, waiting to embark, while the Treasury was fairly overflowing. There was no time to convey the treasure aboard the few small ships in the harbor, as the Mexican troops were fairly in sight of the city, so that such as were able were glad to flee with their lives, leaving their wealth buried in a thousand places about the city.

AFTER a savage attack and desperate resistance the city fell, but, to the bitter disappointment of the victors, little or no treasure was found. The story is that when the Royal officers saw that there was no hope of withstanding the attack, all of the Royal and Church treasure was collected and thrown into a drain that ran down through the solid rock beneath the Treasury to what was then the beach at the foot of the hundred-foot cliff upon which the building stands. The drain was then sealed up and all evidences of its existence destroyed, after which the Spaniards faced their assailants to the bitter end, neither giving nor asking quarter.

THE following years of bitter strife in Mexico, together with the deep hatred felt by the Mexicans for their erstwhile oppressors, furnish reason enough for most of the treasure so hurriedly hidden at the time of the city's capture remaining undisturbed by those who buried it, only two or three cases being known of descendants of the Spanish refugees returning to San Blas to recover the wealth hidden by their forefathers.

That considerable treasure is scattered throughout the ruins of the ancient city is an indisputable fact, as is witnessed by numerous finds, one of these being an earthen jar containing three hundred golden doubloons found by a boy, half exposed after a rain-storm.

STILL another lost treasure, regarding the existence of which there is little or no doubt, is a hundred slave-loads of gold that was being hurried from Quito to form a part of the ransom of Atahualpa.

When news of Pizarro's foul murder of that unfortunate Inca monarch reached the convoy, it was turned back by those in charge and hurried day and

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night back toward the northern capitol of the Empire. When within sight of the favorite palace of the great Huayna-Capac the treasure-train was halted and the gold hidden in a small cave, the opening to which was then obliterated and the slaves and escort bound by the most solemn vows never to divulge the secret.

Despite numberless searches, extending practically from 1428 to the present date the treasure, amounting to at least a million and a half dollars, still lies somewhere within sight of the present capitol of Ecuador.—DONALD WILLIAM PAGE.

WHAT was yours? And which one would you choose to spend an evening with? Stephen Chalmers, having paid his tribute in this issue to "adventurers of the hearth," asks a few questions of the rest of you:

It would be interesting to hear what adventures (in fireside imagining) other fellows have enjoyed most. Mine was going back to the little town in Scotland where I was brought up, after ten years of actual adventuring. That was a hair-raiser at every street-turning, at every familiar, half-forgotten gatepost. It was like walking through heaven or hell and meeting ghosts.....Of all the adventurers you have met in the last thousand years of your wanderings, with which, or whom, would you choose to spend an evening? Already I hear a chorus—Napoleon, Columbus, Mark Antony, Harry Morgan, but surely out of the raft would come one name, one figure, and the reasons for his election. And I wonder what these reasons would be? Ever read Hazlitt on "Persons One Would Wish to Have Met"? Lamb, I think, or Thackeray, wished to have been shoeblack to Shakespeare. Personally I would have liked to fish just one afternoon with Walton when they were not rising much, so he would have explained why they didn't and other things in passing. However— —STEPHEN CHALMERS.

THERE comes to us a letter from one of our comrades of the writers' brigade, Charles Brown, Jr., telling of ambulance work on the French front. Ambulance Section No. 92 of New York University was organized and equipped, chiefly through the efforts of Professor Haring, by the students and faculty of that college. Mr. Brown was one of the student volunteers. I've had to hold the letter some time, because of its length, and because it was not mailed till February eleven, but the picture it paints is none the less interesting. A few words were cut—not marked—out by the censor:

Ambulance Section No. 92, attached to..... of the French Army, is quartered in an old French town. All towns in France are old, for that matter. I have been across the whole of this stricken country, most of the way in an auto-ambulance, part in a train, and I can not recall one town with the mark of freshness on it. This one had its inception somewhere back of the wine-and-women days of Louis XIV.

THE town is all interest and color. Those who dwell in it are kind, affectionate, and glad that the American soldier is here. Most of their houses have been shattered beyond all repair. Others have been shelled into ugly piles of débris over which the grass is growing—as if striving to hide away all this brokenness which is so horrible, and yet so sad, to look upon. For in the very early days of the war the boches were here twenty-one days.

There are dwelling places, too, whose yellow walls and red-tiled roofs do not carry a scar. In the front of all of these houses, broken and unbroken, past which limp long roads sadly in want of attention, the maple trees are turning to yellow gold in the late November sun.

I HAVE been up to the front many times. Tomorrow or the day after I am going back again.

I am sitting beside a pine fire in an officer's room, one moment writing, the next lifting my face to watch the red sun glide down, down behind the sloping tiled roofs into late afternoon. Four miles out the road, and just on the fringe of "No Man's Land," men are struggling in rain-lashed trenches, fighting, fighting, fighting. Many of them are going to be brought back in our clumsy blue ambulances—oh, ever so slowly over broken roads—to the base hospitals for mending. Others will be hurled into the nothingness of death as their fingers grip their rifles and their faces distort with pain and fear. While I write these lines, my ears are full of the faint-off day-long booming of the French 105's. It will run on into the dark blackness of night—on, on, always on until there is no saying as to when those guns will be quiet again.

EVERY other day I go out there—to one of the many *poste de secours*, and remain with a driver until the following noon. The *poste de secours* is a short ride behind the trenches and is in no way a soft berth. Neither is it a place for slackers—those with the broad perpendicular yellow streak.

On the down trip the driver and I lumber along roads heavy with camouflage. Overhead stretch brown and green brush strips, reminding me of the mardi-gras decorations back home. We continue out past old barbed-wire entanglements. Devilish contrivances are these entanglements with their stakes set as close as straws in a brush. To these meshes rush the wild hill-winds between the dusk and the dawn to strum their hymns of hate.

WHEN a French soldier is wounded on the field of honor, a message is telephoned to the nearest *poste de secours*.

"An ambulance at once, *monsieur*," an *infirmier* (infirmary attendant) interprets the call, laying the nickel-plated French phone hurriedly on his desk. "At once, *monsieur!*"

Only the day before yesterday I was given one of those verbal orders. It was the first I had ever received, and it thrilled me as nothing else has ever done.

I was on duty at ——, a straggling, shell-torn village that is slowly recuperating in the midst of the trench country.

With me was Charles ("Windy") R. Williams of

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Mamaroneck, N. Y. Men as red-blooded and acclimatized to the winds of the open world as "Windy" Williams are not met with every day. Some time in the not-far-off future, after the scourge of bullet and fire has ceased and the world armies have been disarmed and scattered, I am going to put together a book in which will be sung the strength and valor of those who went out to do their bit so that the world "might be made safe for Democracy." And therein will be written for the eyes of all the name of "Windy" Williams.

WELL, I was at ——. It had been asleep all afternoon in a still blue haze. Near dusk it awakened to watch five German planes that were skimming down to —— to bombard the women and children. They flew straight and swift, humming viciously, like immense dragon-flies, while below them anti-air-craft shells broke with a soft *plop*, throwing out fleecy clouds as white as wool.

As the day began to gloom down to night and the thin streams of smoke from the supper fires rose up, the boches on the far side of "No Man's Land" conceived, for the thousand and first time, the idea of shelling the village. There was not a thing in it that would further their purpose, but to them that made no difference.

The shelling was their rosary. They threw their shells over one by one. Four plunged in the rear of the *poste de secours*, laying the ground open to bedrock. Three struck 500 feet off the shoestring of a street. They ricocheted through the shell zone with a horrible whine, then smote the tormented earth with a roar and a crash.

THE explosions almost stunned Windy and me. Never in all my twenty-eight years had I heard anything so appalling. I am writing nothing but the absolute truth when I emphasize that I could hear those death missiles slow up preparatory to dropping and blowing every adjacent thing into particles as fine as screened gravel.

As the first shell went wild of its mark, I looked hurriedly toward the *poste de secours*.

The excited *infirmiers* were spilling into the street, like ants running off a platter. Some of them fell headlong in their flight to the bomb-proof *abri* or place of shelter.

THE *abri*, a narrow passage burrowed deep under the road and full of the smell of underground things, was at least 200 feet long. Both ceiling and walls were heavily timbered, while on either side of the earth-wet board-walk stretched platforms the length of a man. On these are laid the sick and the wounded during an attack.

Half-way down the *abri* I squatted myself on a platform, sitting beside Windy's long, big-boned body, and waited for the inevitable, all the while feeling, as some men feel in their near-to-dying moments, that my destiny had been snatched out of my hands. No longer was I the captain of my soul.

The next minute (it seemed an hour to me) the French batteries opened. They vomited mouthful after mouthful of life-depriving lead and copper at the Huns on the far side of "No Man's Land." The earth rocked violently with the clatter of the batteries' iron tongues and the thundering and screaming flights of shell.

Neither then nor in the half-hour that dragged on did the boches respond. So Windy and I climbed back to the *poste de secours* and sat in the low white-walled kitchen while François, one of the detached divisional cooks, prepared our day-end meal.

FRANÇOIS, who marched out of the sun-warmed grape lands of the Pyrenees when "To Arms!" sounded on that fateful August morning of 1914, is a small, big-beaming Frenchman with black pupils lying far down in one corner of his eyes, like splotches of ink. His blue blouse and trousers are far too large for him, and the soft black cap that tumbles about his ears is again the size of a mess plate.

Whenever he crossed the rock floor, moving swiftly from the field range to the kitchen table, his muddy wooden shoes hushed the river of French talk which had begun to flow in the dining-room. And while Windy and I ate our tinned beef and French-fried potatoes, he stood near the range, chewing a piece of bread thoughtfully and muttering from time to time in an intense hate voice:

"Boche! Boche! Boche!"

Twice he spat disgustedly into the black gloom beyond the circle of the lantern that hung beside the doorway.

AS SOON as it had come to nine o'clock, Windy took down the lantern and lighted the way to a tent in the woodshed back of the *poste de secours*.

Immediately we sought the two blood-stained *brancards* or French stretchers he had converted into cots.

For a long time—so long that I did not care to hold the exact time in mind—I lay with eyes wide open, feeling lonely and cold in the darkness. I was not homesick. For I have been too long out in the open spaces of the earth for that. Neither was I thinking of a love-woman. There are none of those women in my life. I was lonely, that was all.

Windy wanted to talk, but I would have none of it. Once the French guns began barking far away in the weary hills. They stopped after a while, blowing out of the blue-black of the heavens, their boom going down in the wind. But for the wind and the monotonous croaking of the frogs in a rain-made pond between the yard and the road, all would have been dead calm. I felt lonelier than ever before—oh, terribly lonely. It was as if a cataclysm had swept the world and left only Windy and me to live on for no visible purpose whatever.

SUDDENLY there fell on the graveled path running up to the mouth of the shed the quick clatter of hobnailed boots. The following minute the darkness was parted in two by the broad yellow ray of a lantern and the tent flaps opened to let in a full, black-bearded face.

I raised on my elbow with a start, then, recognizing an *infirmier*, sat up inquiringly.

"*Blessé, monsieur! Toute de suite! Toute de suite!*" he said in fast, guttural accents. His eyes, shining like black buttons, lowered until I felt his garlicky breath burning on my face. "*Toute de suite, monsieur!*"

"A wounded *poilu*," Windy spoke up, throwing off his four blankets. And then, as two years' of high-school French came back to him, "We must go at once—as quickly as possible!"

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WONDERING aloud how far he would have to drive and who the poor *poilu* could be, Windy slipped into his coat and shoes. From the packing-case, a makeshift table at the foot of the brancards, he took both his steel helmet and gas-mask, then hurried out to the shell of a house in which he had parked the Fiat ambulance.

I followed him, thrilled by the whole thing. It was our first call, the call we had crossed the sea to answer first of all, and I wanted to see what lay at the far end of it.

During the next quarter hour we found it difficult to turn over the motor. Not an inch would it budge. The radiator was cold—almost frozen. Twice I brought hot water from the kitchen and poured it over the radiator and the pump. Then I primed the radiator, flooding the four petcocks with essence. After that Windy cranked and damned the machine a full ten minutes before the motor came to with a hard spurt.

WHEN we took to the dark smear of a road—the stars, shining cold and a long way off, threw down but little light in which to drive—the *infirmier* sat wedged between us, wrapped in a long fur coat. He had the *ordre de mouvement* and the word which would carry us past the road sentries.

"Where are we going?" Windy asked him.

"Far down," the *infirmier* motioned, throwing his small gloved hand toward the trench country. "Far, far down."

Keeping the road was the hardest thing Windy and I have had to do since coming to these parts. The road was narrow, in places a thin scratch of path, and the strata of earth had peeled off like the skin of an onion.

Once Windy cried in a strained voice, striving to maintain the road, "I have no eyes to-night, kid. I can not see in this darkness. You'll have to guide me—to keep me on this —— road!"

IN THE eleven years that are coming to a close I have done all manner of things from going down to the South Pacific on a hell-ship to studying in college halls, and I have been to the weird and far-out places of the world, but never until then, away on the slope of the . . . . . did I stand on the running-board of an ambulance, without even so much as a pocket flashlight, to pilot a comrade along a battle-front we had never before seen.

"Let her have the right, Windy," I directed, swinging on to the running-board. And, after we had taken a curve in the road five minutes beyond, "Now, give her the center of the road. Take it easy. Good. You've got her there, Windy. Hold her."

THE Fiat climbed over most of the road in second, at times creeping, it seemed to me, a mile an hour. Worse, not once did Windy throw out a light. The boches would have shelled us immediately.

We were crawling over the crest of a hill when Windy all but ran into an ammunition train. The train, dark like the road, was making slowly ahead of us.

"You —— frog!" Windy shouted at a poilu straddling a truck horse almost at the tail of the train. He braked the car. "Give me part of the road so that I can get by, —— you!" Then he swore again and again, wasting his breath and tongue on the fool.

At the foot of the long hill we began running between two rows of dead trees. Through their thin black ribs we saw star-shells breaking over the front-line trenches less than half a mile away. The yellow shell-fire gave no report, but drifted slowly above "No Man's Land" for two minutes or more, then went out like a torch in the wind.

WHEN midway in the trees, a boche shell sped over the car with a menacing whine and struck near the summit of the hill. Instantly my ears drummed with the horrible scream of the flying-death thing as its entrails were torn from its belly. The man-flesh of the *infirmier* winced hard. I looked at Windy, my nostrils beating like a heart. His tall, big-boned body was hunched against the wheel. Nerved and unafraid, he was driving through the deep road-ruts.

An hour had passed since we left the *poste de secours* at ——. Just when we were beginning to fear that we were going to drive through all the darkness and cruelty of night, we dipped away down into ——, a shell-riddled town, and braked in front of a three-storied stone house that looked across the valley.

"It's the *poste de secours*," I remarked to Windy. And, oddly, I tasted several grams of relief in my voice. "The *poste de secours*."

FROM the narrow doorway, before which stood a whispering group of poilus, I made out a red river of fire wrangling toward the impenetrable blackness of the hills.

"The French fight hard tonight in those trenches," the *infirmier* informed me, turning slowly to go into the *poste de secours*.

I shifted my look from the trenches to the *blessé* lying on a brancard in a long drafty hallway.

The blessé, a middle-aged poilu with thin black whiskers and eyes that were blood-shot and tired, lay blinking at the bandaged foot which showed from between the blankets.

"Shrapnel. Shrapnel!" he spoke up slowly, answering intuitively the question I would have put to him. "Shrapnel!"

The foot had been split open to the bone. And for that he had received five cents a day.

WHEN two *infirmiers* lifted him into the ambulance a few minutes afterward, he neither moaned nor cried.

"*Mon casque*," was all that he said in a quiet way, taking the steel helmet an *infirmier* passed to him a moment before we closed the ambulance door. "*Mon casque*."

Then Windy and I, salvagers of human wreckage, carried him into a base hospital for more capable hands to mend.

And when we were done with him, we rejoiced. For just before driving away from the hospital the medical chief whispered to us:

"He is through with the war. He will not return to the trenches. After he leaves here, he goes back to his woman!"—CHARLES BROWN, JR.

IN MAY the United States District Court revoked the naturalization papers of a foreign-born citizen because of his admitted desire that America should not win the war against the land of his birth, Germany.

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In other words, the man had sworn *full* allegiance to this country and had not given it; he had sworn an oath renouncing *all* allegiance to Germany and had been false to that oath. He had not paid, as agreed, for the citizenship privilege he received from us. Therefore, it was taken from him. Though he had for thirty-five years been an American voter, Frederick W. Wursterbarth, former postmaster of Lakeview, New Jersey, was deprived by the court of his right to vote, of his American citizenship.

IT IS said that years ago there was a similar case in the West, but the present decision, if upheld on appeal, is likely to mark a new era in our guardianship of the privilege of American citizenship.

I hope so. The man who gets citizenship by deliberate perjury or who breaks his sworn oath of allegiance to his adopted country certainly has no right to that citizenship. It is our own shame—and perhaps our own destruction—if we allow him to retain it.

ONE of our stories that interested you strongly was Norman Springer's "A Man and His Name" and it was centered on the fight of a man against the drink habit during a long voyage.

Adventuring as a cure for drink. How drink knocks you out; how to knock it out. How it crawls up on you; how to crawl away from it. Can you fight it better outdoors in the open? Can you fight it better adventuring or following the uneventful, routine paths?

For a good many men these aren't just general questions. Often enough they mean success or failure, life or death. Often these men want the answers pretty badly.

I WONDER. Would it be possible to take this subject up at Camp-Fire and get some valuable practical results out of swapping experiences without having any smell of preaching attached to it? It might mean a lot to some comrades. I don't mean that we should discuss any such questions as "Is it naughty to drink?" The discussion I have in mind would be pretty well centered on the fellows who know they drink too much, want to stop and find that stopping is a job that needs all the help a man can lay hands on. If they want that help, why shouldn't we try to give it to them?

There were at least several of you to whom Mr. Springer's story wasn't just a story but a practical personal help, so much so that they wrote in to express their gratitude. And that story didn't have any of the odor of preaching.

SUPPOSE we leave it this way:—If any of you can offer really practical help and facts along this line, send it in. If any want to get such facts, and help write to Camp-Fire. Names and addresses, if desired, need not be printed. In other words, let's leave the gates open a while and see how things work out. If nothing much happens, all right. If both demand and supply seem pretty strong, why, maybe we've found something else worth doing.

SOME more "dope" on the pioneers, particularly about the much-discussed Captain Drannan. Also an inquiry—and another example of the good comradeship among Camp-Fire members:

Denver, Colo.

Here is a little dope on Captain Drannan. In a showcase in the Colorado State Historical Museum is a beautifully embroidered buckskin suit and an old-fashioned, round-crowned sombrero to match. Accompanying these are a photograph, a lithograph and a crudely made dagger. The suit has the following information pinned on it.

"Captain W. F. Drannan took the skins this suit is made of in the raw state and made them into buckskin. The suit was cut, made, and embroidered by his wife, Mrs. Sybil H. Drannan. Donated by Mrs. Belle H. Drannan, Mineral Wells, Texas."

The knife has this with it. "Captain Drannan took this knife from Myers, the white desperado who hired the Indians to massacre the Gordon emigrant train in 1853."

THE lithograph shows an old man in a buckskin suit sitting on a settee. The original had evidently been taken in a studio. It is signed at the bottom in pencil. "Captain W. F. Drannan, Chief of Scouts." At the side, in the same old-fashioned writing, are the words, "In his seventy-first year."

The photograph shows him in the same attire sitting on a camp chair on a sidewalk holding a book on his knee. Hanging on a telephone-pole is a large banner with the legend, "Captain Wm. Drannan, the oldest scout now alive and the only living companion of Kit Carson that crossed to the Rockies in '47. Read his book and see what he has done for his country." The picture was taken parallel to the street and there are no objects in sight from which a stranger could judge where it was taken. There is a second telephone-pole near with a sign bearing these names on it, "Market, Barber Shop and The Burkhart Laundry." Maybe some of our Southwestern friends will recognize them.

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A YEAR ago a friend of mine loaned me and offered to give me Captain Drannan's book, "Thirty-One Years on the Plains." I wish now that I had accepted it. After reading Mr. Caldwell's letter I phoned my friend and asked him if he was still willing to part with it. As it happens, he also is an adventure fan and, after reading said letter, he said he wouldn't part with the book for any consideration.

No War Baby ever rose in value any faster than the book did in his estimation. However another friend of mine runs a second-hand bookstore and he located two copies in his files, one of which I immediately secured. If Mr. Caldwell doesn't locate Mr. Buck's one let me know and I will see that he gets the other one.

LAST Fall, while working in a construction camp, I heard mention of the "Jackson Hole Gang" and also a bad man named McCoy and a woman rustler called "Cattle Kate." The "Jackson Hole Gang" I had heard of before, but I am curious as to the other two. All that I know is that they operated in Wyoming. Perhaps some old-timer can enlighten us.—LESTOR B. WOOD.

P. S.—I stopped in the library to see if they had Drannan's book. Imagine my surprise when I found listed a second book, a sequel to the first, entitled "Captain W. F. Drannan," by himself. Immediately called for the book and was informed by the attendant that it was out. I guess that some other fan beat me to it. The attendant told me that in the last few days there had been a number of inquiries for it and that she wondered what the reason was. I don't think it is very hard to guess.

L. B. W.

P. S. No. 2—Here I am again. Some time back you published a letter (I think Mr. Brininstool wrote it) that spoke of Frank Gruard. It cleared a mystery that had long been in my mind. In the museum is a picture of a dark-skinned man wearing white man's clothes, bearing the inscription "Frank Gooard a Kanaki," followed by a short history. I looked high and low for a tribe called the Kanaki. When I couldn't locate them I went back and took another look at the picture. The man had a most un-Indian countenance, the nose being broad and flat and the lips being thick and full, suggestive of the Ethiopian or Polynesian types. I rejected the former because of the straight shiny hair and thin sparse mustache hanging low on the upper lip (like on Mexicans you sometimes see) and the latter because who ever heard of a South Sea Islander fighting Indians? On the way home I started to read the "Camp-Fire." One of the first things I saw was an account of Frank Gruard, a Kanaka. The problem was solved. It's funny how things will connect up, isn't it?—L. B. W.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, H. P. Holt rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. And I think maybe we'd all like to shake hands with Captain Jim Gorring.

I have wandered pretty nearly everywhere in tramp steamers in search of happiness and material for books and stories.

ONE day, about eight years ago, on a two-by-four little island named Tarkei, to the east of Fiji, I felt myself going under with malaria, which I had contracted in Africa. The only person on Tarkei with whom I could exchange five words was a Portuguese. He was never sober and had a lurid reputation altogether. I had nearly four thousand dollars in my belt—every cent I owned.

The Portuguese was a real beach-comber—about the worst kind of type for a sick man to lean up against. His shoes were worn to nothing. He grunted, looked at my shoes, which were fairly new, and sat down to wait till he could step into them. I omitted to speak of the contents of my belt, or he would not have done any waiting. I should have gone down the sunset trail within a few hours if a trading schooner had not dropped anchor off the beach to get water.

The skipper—a complete stranger to me—came ashore and, while I was unconscious, took a hand in the game. He stayed there for three days, entirely for my benefit, and pulled me through. He stripped my belt off me and wore it till I was fit to go aboard with him. Then I remained on his schooner for four months, pottering about among the islands, trading with blacks who were mostly only about one-hundredth part civilized.

HIS name was Jim Gorring, and I believe he lives near Sydney, Australia, today. Anyway, I took him for my model in "A Flutter in Salvage." Jim couldn't help helping others, but never could make money for himself because he was curiously ingenuous and an altruist. He always insisted on holding prayers, morning and night, whether the crew liked it or not, except when we were just hanging on to the old schooner with our eyebrows. Also he hated to see a man drink liquor. I met him in Sydney a couple of years after our cruise in the south seas, and found he had had a stroke of luck such as sailors hope for but rarely experience. He had salved an abandoned bark laden with a valuable cargo, and, after the settling up, had "dropped his anchor ashore."

DON'T forget to be marking down your selections for our vote on the ten most popular stories in our magazines during the year 1918.

WHAT is the candidate who makes a campaign promise to the people and, when elected by them, breaks his promise? Can any one make him out to be anything but a liar? And do you like a liar? And trust him? Do you like a man whose promise is worth nothing? And trust him? Do you consider him fit to hold a public office?

Probably you'll say no to all these questions, *but* do you make it a point never to vote again for such a man? Or even to keep close tabs on him and his promises and how he keeps them? If not, just how good an American citizen are you?

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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LOOKING AHEAD

"Win the War but Get Ready for Peace"

No matter how long the war lasts it is our first duty during that time to work unrelentingly for victory. But we have a second duty. In peace we failed to prepare for war. In war we must not fail to prepare for peace.

To help in meeting this second duty while we are meeting the first, *Adventure* has instituted this department. Its main purpose is to direct our readers' attention more definitely to the many problems America will face when peace comes and to offer an open forum for exchange of views.

In order to hear from as many as possible each expression of opinion must be limited to not more than one hundred and fifty words at most. Merely state the problem that, to you, seems most urgent, adding briefly if you like, your idea of the right solution. The department's value lies in the opinions taken as a whole, not in any one of them.

"Looking Ahead" is not a place for editorial opinion. It is a forum for the opinions of as many as possible; its office is to seek the consensus of those opinions as a guide and stimulus to all. The editors will do their honest best to make the selection for publication as closely as possible indicative of the proportionate importance given the various problems and suggestions by the Americans of all classes and conditions who read our magazine.

It is up to you as an American to do your part. If you haven't thought about these things, think now. Then tell us what you think.

All contributions must be signed, with address given. Only initials will be printed if you insist, but the nation's problems are matters on which an American should not be afraid to speak over his own name.

EDITORIAL NOTE:—*Merely to give an idea of the kind of item wanted and to fill in the gap until there has been time for opinions to come in from our readers and reach them again in print, the four of us on Adventure's staff give our own individual opinions below:*

War has caused an unusual economic condition within the country. It has been necessary to increase production enormously. When the war is over and it becomes no longer necessary to send our foodstuffs abroad or to provide clothing and equipment for our expeditionary forces, what will happen to prices? Will the machinery of production which has been developed provide us with cheaper food and clothing, or will the loss of Government work cause a general depression?—J. E. COX.

After the war the labor problem will face every working man and woman in the United States. Thousands of men from the Army will not be willing to take up the old grind where they left it. They will demand shorter hours, better pay and greater opportunities. On the other hand many of the women who have taken their places during the war will stay in industrial life. With this cheap labor employers will not be willing to meet the increased demands of the returned soldiers. Many men will be forced out of their former occupations and will have to learn new trades. These shiftings will affect our whole industrial life and come directly home to each one of us.—A. H. BITTNER.

To my mind the most important post-war human problem is to readapt the soldiers to the industrial conditions of peace. They will have grown to like strong man's food and an outdoor life, which they have been enjoying under an iron discipline; they will return to empty pantries and stupid jobs, with that discipline removed.—F. K. NOYES.

The fundamental problem to be met after the war is the creating of a clearer understanding and cleaner practise among Americans of the duties and obligations of citizenship and of democracy. Without this, all other progress and reform are only houses built on sand. You can not carry water in a sieve. You can not build a sound house out of bad bricks.—A. S. HOFFMAN.

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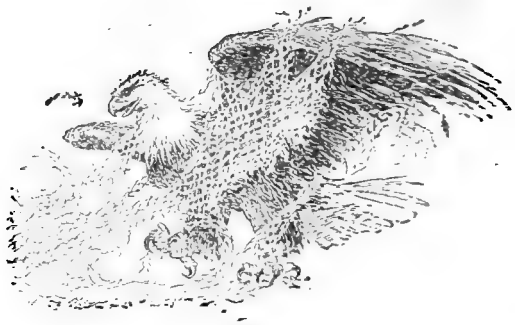
FIGHTING THE HUN WEB



A department devoted to throwing light upon the actual workings of the subtle German propaganda in the United States, Canada and the other Allied countries. Every time you discover one of the strands of this web, tell the rest of us about it, briefly but clearly. Once seen, it loses its dangerous power.

EDITORIAL NOTE:—*Until there has been time for readers' reports to come in and be printed we of the staff will gather a few Hun tricks and state them here:*

PROPAGANDISTS are making a practise of leaving bits of paper, purporting to be parts of torn-up letters from soldiers, where they may be found by Americans with relatives in France. These odds and ends of letters tell of "mismanagement" and "lack of discipline and leadership" among the Allies, represent the American forces as being badly equipped, undisciplined and cruel, and give the impression that Germany is invincible. Undated, unaddressed, unsigned and untrue these letters can only be denied; they can not be disproved. Look out for them—F. K. NOYES.

THE most subtle German propaganda is that which takes advantage of mankind's inherent weakness—the desire to rush off and tell anything one learns.

Here's a lying story that got told that way to me:

A mother received a letter from her soldier son in France, asking for a sweater. She knitted one, using expensive wool, sewed a ten-dollar bill between the thicknesses, wrapped and addressed the package and took it to the Red Cross where she was assured it would go right to France. Two weeks later he wrote her to hurry the sweater along; later wrote again. She went to the Red Cross and found a nurse wearing that sweater. The nurse claimed it was her own. The indignant woman got a policeman, but the nurse bluffed it out until the mother told of the hidden bill and produced it. She got her sweater back and was told there must have been some mistake.

Several weeks later to my astonishment I overheard a man in the train telling the story to his neighbor. *His sister* had had the experience. But the woman in the first instance has no brother. Since then I have run against the yarn twice more in equally contradictory forms and always obviously a lie. Investigation proved that my informant had also heard it from another. When you hear a tale reflecting upon our Army, Navy, Red Cross, or Government, look for the German propaganda back of it.—A. H. BITTNER.

NOT merely is the German language being taught in the schools. In college we used to read the German classics. They were harmless enough. Not always so harmless were the men who taught them. I remember one who could always find occasion to remark—

"Of course, gentlemen, you must admit that all of the world's progress for the past fifty years has come from Germany."

And if any one should protest he would only stroke his *Kaiserliche* mustaches and say—

"*Ach*, nonsense."

It is not only the German language that will hurt the school-children—it is the way it is often being taught.—J. E. COX.

YESTERDAY I ran through the headlines of daily papers from 1914 to date. One of the most significant things noted was that from almost the beginning of the war there have been the same reports we're getting now about Germany's starvation, Austria's imminent dissolution and other signs of revolution or crumbling in the Central Powers. German propaganda. To make us think they'll fall to pieces without much effort on our part. If all those reports were true, then Germans haven't eaten anything for two years.

The iron-clad German censorship decides just what reports shall be given out. "Never do what your enemy wants you to do." Never believe what your enemy wants you to believe. We can't trust to our enemies' falling to pieces; we've got to knock them to pieces.—A. S. HOFFMAN.

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For 25 cents we will send the same card in aluminum composition, perforated, a each end. Postpaid. This is cost.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: November, 1910; March and October, 1911; May, 1912; June, 1914; June, 1915; June, 1916; Mid-March, 1918. State price.—H. G. BARNES, Box 141, St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp at the Front, or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

MACK MCKENNEY, care of *Adventure.*

BOATSWAIN G. BARNES, U. S. S. *Columbine*, care of Postmaster, New York.

No. 41330 GM. PAUL BEAUCOIN, care of Mrs. M. Maidment, No. 1 South Street, Epsom, Surrey, England.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

American Defense Society, Inc.—An organization working systematically for real Americanism and furthering the winning of the war by watchfulness and effort at the right points. Address 44 East 23rd Street, New York City.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 33d Ave., N. E. Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America. Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S., should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries. (Mr. Whiteaker is now serving with our army in France. His department is accordingly in abeyance until we find a suitable successor.)

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, Honolulu, T. H. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Nitro, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios. (Mr. Ritchie is now in France as a correspondent. His department is accordingly in abeyance till we find a suitable successor.)

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U.S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes: markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 724 North 3d St., Reading, Pa. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Fielding Star*, Fielding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner; R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't. of Com., Wash., D. C.

* *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following Ask Adventure editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

AS THIS comes out, we've all, or nearly all, of us had our vacations; and, if we've run true to form, the actuarial average of those who wish they'd spent their time off in some other way than they did spend it figures around 99.44 per cent. So every one of us will enjoy reading how the other fellow planned to do his loafing, and maybe thereby will also pick up the germ of a really *good* vacation idea for next year. Brethren, the floor is freely and gladly conceded to those far-flung, itching-heeled sons of *Ulysses*, Messrs. Spears, Dingle, Carson & Co.—to them, and to the proponents of the questions which they answer:

Cruising Canadian Waters

Question:—"This week-end I expect to put over my new forty-foot power-cruiser, which I have named *Adventure*.

"I am planning a cruise to Lake St. John, Quebec, if I find it practical.

"The boat is eight feet beam, draws thirty-four inches of water at propeller, has four-cylinder, four-cycle, twenty-horse-power reliable motor of good make. I use kerosene for fuel and make ten real miles per hour on two gallons. Tank capacity forty gallons kerosene and twenty gallons gas. What I would most like to know is:

"1.—Will there be any unusual customs difficulties, at the Canadian port of entry, on account of war conditions?

"2.—Are there any canals to negotiate after passing the Lake George Canal, and if so what are the tolls?

"3.—What are the charges on the Lake George Canal?

"4.—Are there any rapids that are dangerous or impractical for a boat of *Adventure's* dimensions either between Lake Champlain and Montreal or farther on—say on the Saguenay?

"5.—What is the prevailing price of gas and kerosene-oil in Canada?

"6.—Where may reliable charts of the St. Lawrence and Saguenay Rivers below Lake St. John be obtained, as well as charts of the Hudson, Lakes George and Champlain and outlet?

"7.—Can one depend upon a full supply (kerosene) within reasonable distances, say one hundred miles, after leaving Quebec city?

"8.—Is there an alternative water route to

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Montreal from the head (or is it the foot?) of Lake Champlain, or does one have to go to Sorel on Lake St. Peter?

"I would thank you very kindly for such of the above information as you may be able to supply or suggestions beyond the direct field of inquiry.

"As to supplies and equipment in a general way I think I can make out, as this matter is simplified when one has a boat of the size of *Adventure*. Besides I have had some experience myself, along these lines.

"Should this trip materialize, and should you care to hear something about it I would be very glad to write you on my return, with perhaps a few photos to illustrate. Meanwhile I thank you in advance for what consideration you may give my inquiries and enclose stamped and addressed envelope."—GORDON BAXTER, Palmyra, New Jersey.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—I don't think there is anything in the way of the trip you plan, except that you can not ascend the Saguenay higher than Chicoutimi, about sixty miles of the one hundred and twenty miles to Lake St. John, Quebec. Your boat will go through the canals from Hudson River to Lake Champlain and down to St. Lawrence River. But I suggest that you write to Superintendent of Public Works, Albany, New York, for canal regulations, etc., and a map, and charges, if any.

You might consider going *via* Barge Canal, Oswego Canal, Lake Ontario, making Kingston your Canadian port of entry (Custom-House). Write to your intended port of entry, "Inspector of Customs," and inquire about regulations; they do not put burdens on tourists and sportsmen, except the fishing, hunting license, and bonds against sale of boat and material in Canada. This the inspector will write you about.

4.—St. Lawrence River rapids, but canal around them.

5.—Don't know about Canada gas and kerosene—very high, however.

6—U. S. Lake Survey, Detroit, Michigan; St. Lawrence River charts, and Great Lakes; Saguenay River from local agent (ask customs office in Canada); kerosene at all towns; only one canal from (it's foot of) Lake Champlain down (river and locks).

Charts of Hudson, I think, from War Department, Washington, D. C. List of Lights, from Lighthouse Board, Washington, D. C.; would suggest that you write Superintendent Public Documents, Washington, D. C., and ask him for list of Government reports relating to Hudson River, Adirondack region, Lake Champlain, New York canals, St. Lawrence River, etc., and a selection from the catalogs will add greatly to your information (general and particular) and consequent enjoyment of the trip—which is a good one to make, I'm sure, though I've never been below Alexandria Bay. Parkman's "LaSalle" and "Champlain" histories will give you the story of that land.

Off Central America

Question:—"Can you give me an idea as to a small sailboat for use along the Central American coast? Mostly for pleasure—two men. What kind of sea is there inside Gulf of California?"—RAYMOND GRAY, Buffalo, N. Y.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—A moderate-draft keel sloop or yawl, or one of the semi-centerboard boats that are fairly deep without the board down, would be suitable for cruising with two men. For any kind of work where outside passages may have to be made it is well to use care in the selection of your boat. The first requisite, of course, is ease of handling and seaworthiness of type. You will be better off by sacrificing possible speed in light weather to stoutness and stiffness under pressure.

Have plenty of beam, and get a boat that is mostly BOAT and not a shallow dish with a slim keel.

Don't be fooled by lofty cabins into taking a boat whose deckroom is all taken up by an immense cabin trunk. Have your decks free and your house low and almost flat; you will find the benefit when she is scooping green seas over the bows and the water runs off without being banked up against a high trunk. And personally I have found short ends better for sea work than the fantail, overhang bow type. In fact I prefer a straight stem, very short stern craft, for any business other than regatta sailing.

A sloop or yawl, short-rigged, pole-mast, about 35 over-all length, 12-beam, 4-draft (or 5 if a keel boat) should be sound and easy handling. You can simplify the rig yourself by taking a look at any fishing or working sloop around 40 feet, and following the experience-taught ideas of such craft. The 35-foot clammers and oystermen are good patterns in simplicity.

Regarding the Gulf of California, there is fairly good sailing there, but the upper end is shoal in many places. There are few places where water can be got; but you can store up with pretty much everything at Guaymas, or at Mazatlan.

The best thing to do is to send sixty cents to the Hydrographic Office, Navy Department, Washington, D. C., for a copy of the "Mexican and Central American Pilot—Pacific Coast Part—Catalog Number 84." which contains directions and recent data for the Gulf and most of Central America on that side. You will find this very useful. It will tell you every harbor and safe anchorage, where water and provisions are to be got, and give you all known dangers to navigation, also prevailing winds for different months, currents, etc.

Champlain to New Orleans by Boat

Question:—"I live on Lake Champlain. Is it possible to go from here to New Orleans by water *via* the Mississippi River? What sort of boat would be best? Would a sailboat be all right? If so what style and size? What route should one take? Have you any idea how long it would take? If I concluded to continue from New Orleans to Florida, would same type of boat do or not?

"If this is published please do not publish my name."— —— ——, East Alburgh, Vermont.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—You would follow Lake Champlain to the head, go through the Champlain Canal, go into the Barge Canal, and west into Lake Erie, and thence to Fox River or the Chicago Drainage Canal, and down to the Illinois River and into the Mississippi.

I wouldn't recommend a sailboat unless you had auxiliary power. Canal towing in sailboat, long

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and tedious job; the gasoline boat is preferable, and you could go through in one from twenty-two foot to sixty or seventy foot length; about thirty feet long, twenty-eight-inch to thirty-two-inch draft would be, perhaps, preferable. Once in the Mississippi, you'd just float down. You could go through in a twenty-foot rowboat, with camping outfit.

Depends on type of boat, and day's travel, how long it would take. Say, ten days to twenty days to Buffalo, and then two weeks to month to Chicago; then a week or two to Mississippi; then six weeks to six months to New Orleans; then a month or two to Florida.

You would want lake charts (Lake Survey Office, Detroit, Michigan); river maps, (Mississippi River Commission, St. Louis, Missouri).

Into the Big-Game Country

Question:—"I would like to have you send me information that would help me in a trip up through British Columbia into the big-game country. My pal and I are thinking of making the trip. I have been over New Mexico and old Mexico and would like to take a trip up there before I kick off."—WALTER L. HAYES, Haverhill, Kansas.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—Pardon me if I am in error but I gather from the tone of your letter that you are under the impression that a person can wander through the big-game countries of British Columbia killing indiscriminately. If so you are very far wrong. A yearly license to hunt and fish will cost you just $100. The estimated expense of a six weeks' trip into the Cassiar country is $1,000 per man. A bear license for Spring shooting alone costs $25, and to this you must add the expense of hiring a guide.

If you just want to take a trip through British Columbia for the purpose of seeing the country and doing a little hunting and fishing by way of amusement the best way is to take out a free miner's license which costs $5 and not only permits you to prospect but also to take such fish and game as may be necessary for food.

For trapping no license is needed.

You can get full verification of this together with much valuable information by applying to the Provincial Game Warden, Vancouver, B. C.

Now it may be that I have taken your meaning erroneously, but you only mention big game and I thought it well to put you straight right on the start.

Junketing through the Canal

Question:—"I read *Adventure* as I love an open-air life. Have done quite some traveling in this and other lands. Wish to make a cruise in near future on a small auxiliary boat, party of six, and would like to have a good idea of the nautical expenses of a trip say Key West to Havana, to Panama passing the canal and up to Los Angeles, stopping at two or three ports on Pacific coast.

"Am not a marine expert and want to know the costs of the passage of a small boat through the canal and at ports for supplies. Boat about forty feet long.

"Where might I buy second-hand charts and practical books in brief condensed form on navigation of small boats, tides, currents, winds, etc., and second-hand instruments?"—B. PERKINS, Lake Park, Georgia.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—The "nautical expenses" of such a vessel as you mention are small. A boat registered in a recognized yacht club need pay no port charges anywhere that I have visited.

Canal tolls are a matter hard to define in such a case, and I should advise you to inquire of the Canal Commission at Washington. The actual rates fixed for commercial vessels is $1.20 per ton and $1.50 per passenger; but I believe you will find these tolls slightly higher than you would have to pay, since such a small craft, handled with her own power, not only does without car-towage, but can slip into a lock along with other craft.

Cost of supplies also is a thing which varies so much that it is almost impossible to give you an estimate. For instance, in Iquique, Chile, water costs six dollars (Chilean) a ton, while in other ports it is free for the getting, and in still others can be got from water-boat at a price one-fifth the above. So with food. It depends what you want where you are.

The trip you suggest, however, covers ports which are reasonable in price and affording good stocks of provisions of every kind. My own plan would be to carry everything possible to get right from your starting point. Since commercial vessels have been cut out from trade to such an extent, in every outport which depended on them for stores prices are kiting. Buy all your canned goods or preserves anyway right at home.

If I quoted prices now, which I should have to do from my own experiences prior to the war, you would find them so utterly different now that my dope would all seem wrong.

As for second-hand charts and instruments, don't think of taking second-hand charts. These sheets are so cheap and so vital to safe navigation that a man is a fool to risk his boat by taking an old survey as his guide.

A good compass could be bought cheap—unless the government, too, has snapped them all up in common with barometers, sextants, binoculars, etc., and you could get such things as well as anywhere right there in Savannah or Brunswick. Charts, Sailing Directories, Tide and Light Tables, are sold by M. H. Johnson, Custom House, Brunswick, and George I. Morris, Custom House, Savannah.

Charts of the various stretches of coast or single ports cost fifty cents to sixty cents each; sailing directories cost from sixty cents to ninety cents according to locality and date of survey. Tide tables for Atlantic and Pacific coasts are ten cents each; light lists are free.

One of the best small works of Navigation that I know of is MacArthur's, published by the Rudder Company, New York, at one dollar.

Some Questions about Firearms

YOU who have been following the articles and discussions on firearms in "Camp-Fire" will read this pair of letters with especial interest. If you have anything to add or correct, shoot it in. And incidentally, in view of the fact that Mr. Robertson failed to tell us just why the Webley & Scott .45 automatic is so heavy, can somebody else supply the information?

Question:—"I am a reader of *Adventure* and for the first time I am taking advantage of the offer it

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makes its readers, viz: 'Ask Adventure.' I am aware of the fact that the information I am after is really outside the department, but I am hoping you, being an outside man, will be good enough to give your advice to another who loves the big free parts, or if for some reason you do not wish to answer, will you if possible forward my letter to another who will? The information I want is on automatic pistols.

"I think the Colt people made their good name from the old *heavy* .45 revolver. I have used this gun a lot and could not want a finer. I have used their .45 auto pistol, which is light, and can do nothing with it. I have also used the Luger, another light gun, with the same result.

"I am an Englishman and that may account for it, but the fact remains in my opinion the finest gun ever made is the Webley & Scott .45 auto pistol, an ideal holster gun, but too heavy for the clothes. By cutting a slit in my pants over the right hipbone, I can pack a .45 Colt's auto and never know it's there, but this can not be done with a Webley.

"A .32 Webley weighs more than a .45 Colt: Why? You will admit England can make as fine steel as America; English gunsmiths don't make their guns heavy for the sake of making them unhandy to pack. I imagine they consider the powerful charge behind must have that weight of steel to make them safe.

"Now I want a gun with good stopping power that is not too heavy. Can you from your personal experience advise me? A Savage I have been told is a light gun and will shoot straight; is it safe? Any time I am firing a powerful light gun I find myself expecting it to blow to pieces. I never have this feeling with a .45 Colt revolver, or a .45 Webley automatic.

"Lots of people I have questioned have said, 'Oh, this or that gun is quite safe; it has been proved by so and so.' Then *why* do the Webley people put in the extra weight?

"One more question. I think you will admit that when a fellow uses a short gun nine out of ten times it's at close quarters; for this reason it must have big stopping powers. I have always used a .45. Do you think a .38 any good? Do you think anything of the practise of nicking the bullet to make it mushroom? Would a soft one be better for stopping than a steel-jacketed?

"I shall be awfully obliged to you if you can give me any information on these subjects and shall take it as a great favor, if you know of any really *good* book written by a man who *knows*. I shall be glad to hear of it; the ones I have read have been piffle.

"Thanking you very much on anticipation."—S. H. PROCKTER, Vancouver, B. C.

Answer, by Mr. Robertson:—I am something of a bug about guns myself, so we have a common subject. I have had more time wasted (?) on this subject than any other.

I think when I was about ten years old my experiences with pistols began. I used to swipe out my father's old Colt's .45 and take it out and play Wild West with it. As soon as I was old enough to have a gun I bought an old Colt's .32 and I have been buying and trading ever since.

I have arrived at the conclusion that it makes little difference what caliber and so forth the gun is, if the man behind it can handle it, for he will generally bring home the bacon.

Some prefer the automatic type of gun, others the single action, and so forth. Any of the Colt's guns will bring down their men, that is if you hit him in the right place; the .38, the .41, and all of the .45's will do the work. Some prefer a soft-nosed bullet, others the steel jacket. It makes little difference, as one usually used this kind of a gun at short range, and a hit will put your opponant out of the ring.

If you care for the technical side, think you will get all you want out of any of the sporting and hunting magazines. They all have a gun department; each one has a favorite, and as a result, you will get all the information that you wish as to trajectory and so forth.

Asked the Wrong "A. A." Man

THIS is printed just to show what happens when you don't heed the few simple rules according to which this department is published. Here's an inquirer asking a big batch of interesting questions, and we don't get the answers because he asked the wrong man:

Question:—"I wish to get some information regarding the schools the Government is running to train officers for the Merchant Marine. I have heard there are twenty such schools on the Atlantic coasts. That they are free, have a six-week course, and are divided into the engineering and navigation branches.

"Is there such a school in Texas? Where? How much would it cost to complete course, board and all? What would be the rank and pay of the graduate at first and is promotion any faster than in any other line of work? Would I have to join for a certain number of years as in the Navy? Would I have a choice in what vessel I went on and could I change vessels? Could I get on a vessel in South American trade?

"I was 17 years old the second of February, 1918. I am 5 feet 11 inches high, weigh 130 pounds, and am in good health and as strong as the average boy of my age, I have finished the eighth grade in the Oklahoma Public Schools. Made general average of 89 5-6 per cent.

"Please give me all the information possible. I don't claim to like to work any better than the other fellow but I'm not afraid of getting my hands dirty.

"Thanking you and *Adventure*."— ——— ———, Mostyn, Texas.

Reply, by Mr. Robertson:—Your inquiry is out of my line altogether. There is not any school of this character in Texas that I know of. Would suggest that you write to Captain A. E. Dingle, Care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York, New York. He will doubtless give you the information you desire.

I think you have the right spirit, and I am sure that you will succeed in whatever line you go into. Now is the time for a young man of your age to make up his mind what he is going to make of himself. I wish you luck, hope you get into this school, and that you will command your own vessel some of these days, as you surely will, if you stay with the ship.

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HOW TO HELP WIN THE WAR

A Department Telling What *YOU* Can Do And How to Find Out About It

To make such a department comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date entails much work and considerable machinery. Since this machinery has already been created and put into operation, *Adventure* can render service most efficiently by giving its readers the use of this practical agency for connecting individual willingness with national needs.

***Adventure's* big brother, *Everybody's Magazine*, now conducts a "War Service Guide."**

There are thousands of good Americans who, with all their hearts, want to help in the big job at hand, but do not know what to do or how to find it and it is these patriots which *Everybody's* "Guide" wants to help enlist where they can be of real service. If you are one of them, write to Mr. Hoyt, care of *Everybody's* "Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Tell him your circumstances and your qualifications—whether you are looking for volunteer or paid work, whether you can give all or part time, in your home town only or anywhere the job may call you. Give him all the data he may need to judge what work you might do. There are "bits" to be done in farm and industrial work, in various relief organizations and in the Government offices as well as in the Army or Navy.

***Everybody's* "Guide" will also be glad to tackle any question of allowance or allotment, Government insurance or legal status growing out of the new and closer relationship which many are forming with Uncle Sam. Let *Everybody's* "Guide" try to help you.**

Do YOUR Part

Find out what to do and how to do it by writing to *Everybody's* "War Service Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

HECK, "HELL-ROARING." Last heard of in Plainfield, N. J. Write to your old friend and partner, "SPANISH JACK," at the same old address.

DUNKERLEY, FRED. Left home two years ago. 5 feet 9 inches, tall, round-shouldered, wore glasses, a small scar over one eye and straight black hair streaked with gray. Wore size 7 hat and 7½ shoes. Cigarmaker by trade. Any information concerning him would be appreciated.—Address MRS. FRED DUNKERLEY, 35 Mechanics St., Norwood, N. Y.

JACKSON, CHARLES, Med. Corps., U. S. A. Information of his whereabouts would be appreciated.—Address H. J. HENRY, care of *Adventure.*

ATTENTION Boys of the 213th O. S. Batt. C. E. F. American Legion. Write to one of the gang that was at Camp Borden, Ontario and St. Catherines, Ontario. Would like to hear from you. If this strikes your eye write.—Address COOK WILLIAM NORMAN, care of *Adventure.*

STILLINGS, GEORGE E. Last heard of in Montreal, Canada.—Address J. F. KNISELY, Philadelphia, Pa.

LASKI. Information desired of CHARLES or ALEXANDER. Last heard from in New York in 1891. It is to the advantage of either or both of them that they communicate with me. Any news of them gratefully received.—Address D. W. HULBURD, Attorney, Witherspoon Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa.

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SHAFFER, E. T. Telegraph operator. Last heard of working for the N. & W. in Virginia, in 1906, but understand he went back West. A. write to me. Have been trying to locate you ever since "Mama's little Willie boys went around the world."—Address C. M., Portage, Ohio.

CHAFIN, W. R. and RODERIC MORROUGH, of Port Arthur, Texas. Last heard of on U. S. S. *Kanawha*. Write your friend.—Address FRANK HILL, Western Union Telegraph Co., Redding, Calif.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

MANLEY, CLIFFORD E., or C. E. CLARKE. Last heard from December, 1914, in Des Moines. If any one knows his present address, please send it to his mother. —Address MRS. JOHN MANLEY, 1175 East Grand St., Elizabeth, N. J.

LOVE, ROBERT. Last seen in Allentown, Pa., June 1917. His old chum Bill would like to hear from him. —Address WM. A. BUDDING, U. S. S. Submarine E No. 2 care POSTMASTER, New York, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

REDDING, ROBERT C. Former trumpeter, Co. "E" 29th Infantry. Last heard from at Cebu, P. I., about 1905. BOB, if you don't keep closer tab on me, you will never get to blow taps over me.—Address C. M., Portage, Ohio.

WHITE, JOHN S. Son. Disappeared from home five years ago. He is 45 years old, about 5 feet 6 inches tall, light complexion, gray eyes. Mother would be grateful for any information concerning him.—Address MRS. S. J. WHITE, 198 Gibson Ave., Detroit, Mich.

SULLIVAN, JOHN. Shipping steward. About 55 when last heard of 10 years ago. Then on vessels running from Seattle to Fairbanks. Originally from Sydney, N. S. W. Said to have died Vancouver, Canada, about 7 years ago. Ran of heavy build. Definite news of any kind eagerly sought.—Address MRS. BEATTIE, care *Adventure*.

PRICE, GEORGE E. Last heard of in Temple, Texas. About 6 feet tall, brown hair and eyes, scar on left side of face.—Address MRS. JENNIE PRICE, 314 South Virginia St., El Paso, Texas.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-October or First November issues of *Adventure*. They can get name and address of inquirer from this magazine.

ANDERSON, JOHN EMIL; Cunningham, James, Maggie, Mary and John; Chipman —; Dupree, Alex; Fred (Brother); Gainty, John; Gende, Eugenio (Cizzucree Eugenio); Gowen, Floyd E.; Gattroff, Herman Martin; Halloran, "Tom"; Hart, Frank J.; Hugill, Ashton C. and Hugo Van Alstyn; Loveday, Fr.; Marrone, Vito; Rapideau, John; Rigney, Anna; Sibley, John Rodney; Van Sickle, W. D.; Waidner, George; Walker, William; Washbroad, Tommy or Jo.; White, P. I.; White, James Frederick; Zabransky, William.

MISCELLANEOUS—Dodson, Claude.—Miller, Bird, Boyd, or any of the other boys I chummed with in Santa Fé.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. COX, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD
FIRST DECEMBER ADVENTURE

Nine other stories, besides the three mentioned in the ad on page 2, will be yours with the First December issue, in your hands on November 3rd. You will find:

THE GLEANING — ***By S. B. H. Hurst***
The story of a man seeking a distant Indian village, who breaks his leg on the barren snow-fields.

THE SPLITROCK MINE — ***By E. E. Harriman***
An active mine is the Splitrock; but one feature about it is too active—its feud.

CUT FINGER'S REVENGE — ***By Henry Oyen***
A story of the North country and an Indian whose chief desire is the white man's hooch.

THE LAST BEACON — ***By W. A. Macdonald***
Every time the beacon blazes up on the mountain-top the people in the valley shiver, for it means another life is to be taken.

ACCORDING TO BREED — ***By E. S. Pladwell***
Out in the West these two meet; the Western bad-man and the Southern colonel. And the bad-man detests titles.

STRATEGY OF PETER RYE — ***By Harry M. Dean***
A queer person is old wizened *Peter Rye*, the junkman; but even queerer is his well-known hobby.

THE VANISHING DEAD MAN — ***By Hugh Pendexter***
Concerning the queer doings, the midnight lights and spooky sounds in an old deserted mansion.

ALIAS WHISPERING WHITE — ***By W. C. Tuttle***
Magpie and *Ike* come East and break into society—with a big bang. A Tuttle story in which he is at his best.

GABOREAU THE TERRIBLE Part III — ***By Gordon Young***
In the third part of the thrilling story. *Everhard* visits *Jeanne Latour's* uncle, and finds him an unusual gentleman.

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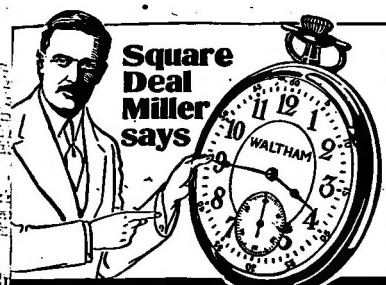

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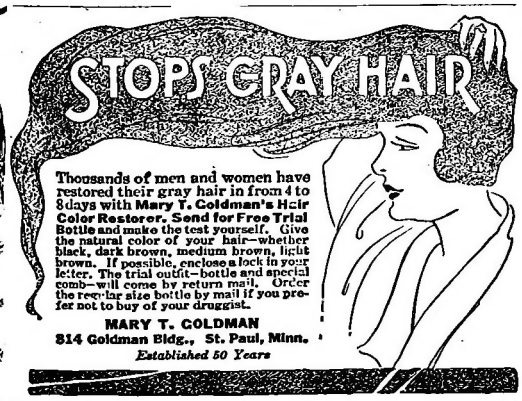
MILLER-HOEFER CO. 1101 Miller Bldg., Detroit, Mich.



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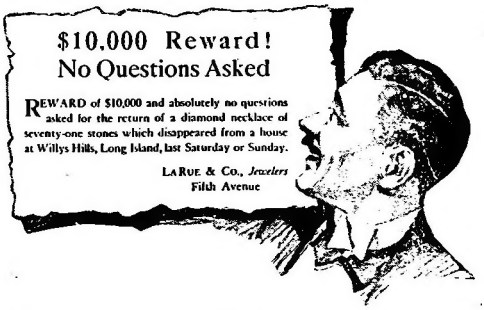
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Send me, all charges prepaid, set of Arthur B. Reeve—in 12 volumes. Also send me, absolutely free, the set of Edgar Allan Poe, in 10 volumes. If the books are not satisfactory, I will return both sets at your expense. Otherwise I will send you $1.50 a month for 13 months. A. F. F.

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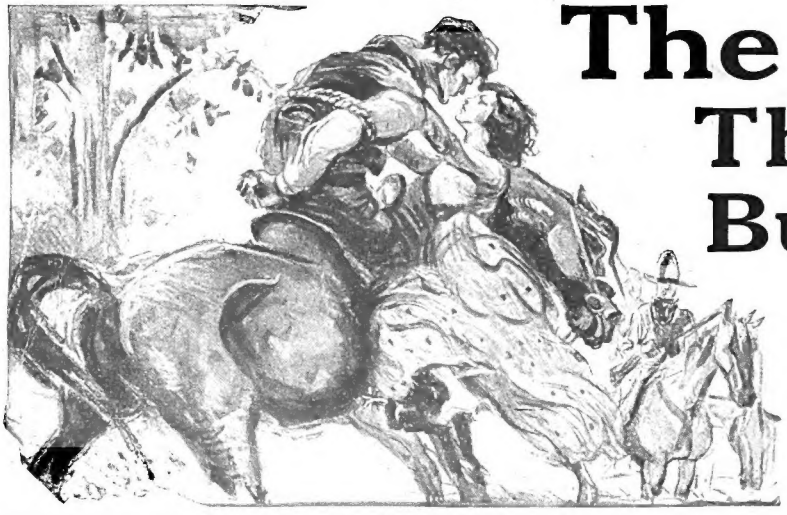

The Kiss That Burned

They were taking him to hang him. Suddenly, from that hostile, jeering crowd, she stood forth. With a quick, lithe spring, her foot was in his stirrup—she had bounded to his saddle!

And then, for a hushed moment—the man on the threshold of death, the young woman in the fullness of youth and beauty—linked together!

And she had never even seen him before!

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The sharp crack of a revolver—the gentle music of a woman's luring laughter—the curse of a man hot in anger—these—all the things that build the fires of life and send the red blood pulsing are in his pages.

Across the mountains surged that throbbing tide of humanity seeking gold—fleeing from disgrace—suffering—hoping. Never was life so swift—so vivid. He was there, he saw it all.

Never was romance so mingled with everyday life—never was life so full of surprises, of galloping adventures. With his pen—as by a miracle—Bret Harte has caught it and set it down.

He is the Spirit given by the Great West to tell the world of the amazing dramas of its heart. *He is the only one who has ever done it.* Others have tried it—they are but his imitators. No one has ever compared with him in doing it. If you do not know Bret Harte, you do not know the West. If you do not know him, you have missed the treasure house of American literature.

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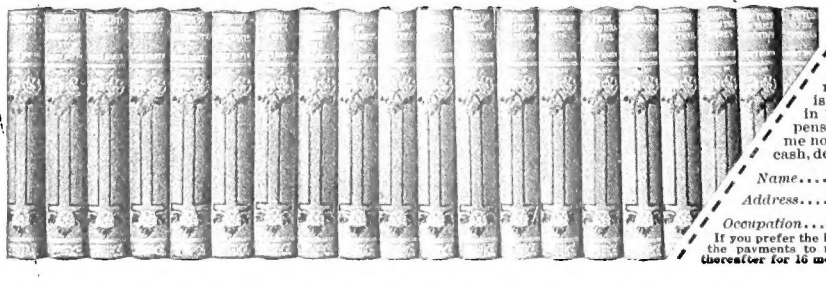

A.F.F.

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